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# THE DOWAGER ;

OR,

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF "MRS. ARMYTAGE;" "STOKESHILL PLACE,"  
"THE PEERESS," &c.

"Un livre est une lettre adressée aux amis inconnus qu'on possède  
dans le monde."—ANCELOT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## CHAPTER I.

An indiscreet person is more hurtful than an ill-natured one; for the latter attacks only his enemies, while the former injures indiscriminately both friend and foe.

ADDISON.

“ INVITED again to the Delmaines?—Oh ! yes !—Go, by all means !” was Lady Medwyn’s reply to the inquiries of Prince Massimo Mazzini. “ They are stupid sort of people, not worth knowing—not in our set ; that is, only in our set at certain times, on certain terms. But you are likely to meet the heiress there,

so it may be as well not to send an excuse."

Prince Massimo bowed and went ;—went and dined ;—dined again and again. The dinner was so far better than his daily fare at Mivart's or the Travellers, that it was gratuitous ; and the Prince's eye was not yet sufficiently familiarized with the shades and varieties of London society, to be aware that aught was amiss with the showy-looking men and women whom he met at the table of the Earl of Delmaine. There was nothing in them ostensibly differing from the people with whom he dined at the Duke of East Looe's, the Marquis of Gateshead's, the Hilsby's, and many others, whom his oracle, Lady Medwyn pronounced to be unexceptionable. Their talk, like the talk of the jockey set, was of whigs, tories and race-horses ; and it was impossible for him to distinguish whether they talked of horses like asses, or of political parties like common-councilmen.

The Earl of Delmaine occupied a handsome house in Belgrave Square, furnished in the most showy manner, and abounding in luxurious display. Lady Delmaine, who was fond of expense, and of asserting her right as an heiress to its indulgence, finding it impossible to reconcile her love of finery with her pretensions to elegant valetudinarianism, had taken, early in her marriage, to purchasing fine furniture in lieu of fine clothes. It was under the gaudy reign of George the Fourth that she had achieved greatness; and the tastes then ascendant had been too eagerly adopted by the new Countess to be readily laid aside. All her care was for the fripperies of life, and having her belongings admired and wondered at. With ostentatious vulgarity, she would canvass her visitors for applause of her marquetry-tables or Sallandrouze carpets; and was never happier than when she had excited the envy of some guest as trifling and narrow-minded as herself.

She had fixed herself in a quarter of the town peculiarly favourable to such displays ; a quarter where, more than in others, the toe of the *parvenu* “comes so near the heel of the courtier that he galls his kibe ;” a quarter uniting the wealth of Young England with the dignity of Old—the aristocracy of the commercial world with that of the throne. In such a neighbourhood, it requires more tact than the Countess possessed, to steer unharmed between her love of astonishing the low, and her love of consorting with the high ; and as, even while pretending to the sublime society of the Melton and Newmarket belles, she could not quite renounce her *parvenue* taste for exchanging dinners on weighty services of plate, with those who were proud to see their venison and turtle eaten by the family of an earl, Johnny Chichester and other close observers noted with a smile that, after entertaining the House of Peers, she had no objection to entertain the India House, or other monied houses ;

and that Lombard Street succeeded, by swift transition, to Park Lane and Berkeley Square.

Among the parties stigmatized by Lady Medwyn to Massimo Mazzini as “not in our set,” and “the Lord knows who,” there were accordingly persons whose word was able to influence the Exchange of any nation in Europe; in whose strong boxes were deposited half the title-deeds of half the peerage; and who, in truth, constitute the dry-nurses of the British constitution, now weaned, unswaddled, and estranged from childish things, it has begun to totter alone.

Had Prince Mazzini been aware of their financial potentiality, he would have treated them with a degree of deference calculated to amaze the high caste of East Loos, Medwyns and Co.; for to say the truth, so low is the estimation of foreigners of the purity of English nobility, that, like the Genoese suitor dismissed by Lady Alicia de Wendover, the Neapolitan prince saw very little difference between English lords and English bankers. He

reckoned them all new people together — all upstarts; much as *we* are apt to confound the classes and distinctions of the United States. Mazzini had seen English merchants and bankers admitted on the continent into the best society, and by their manners and habits doing as much honour to their country as the premier duke; losing their thousands at whist with a sang-froid that Talleyrand might have envied—not only riding their own hurdle chaces, but hazarding a blood horse and a fortune on the event; and was accordingly prepared for the wondrous discrepancy between the bankers of his own country, chiefly Jews and usurers, and the well-bred, well-born money-dealers of a city where money-making is classed among the fine arts, or practical sciences;—men whose cooks, picture-galleries, and studs far exceed those of half the poverty-stricken, or rather vice-im-poverished barons of Magna Charta. He was prepared to bow the knee to Mammon on finding the Cacodemon dressed in one of Burg-

hart's coats, and curled by Muddiman; and instead of taking such pains to Italianize into unintelligibility the names of her father's guests when they happened to belong to the monied thrones and dominions of the Belgrave quarter, Lady Charlotte Chichester would have done well to pronounce them boldly, as among the chief notabilities of the reformed empire of Great Britain. As it was, the Prince only confounded them with the mob of unfashionable nobility so much contemned by his friend and instructress, Lady Medwyn.

Massimo Mazzini was a younger son of one of those ancient Italian princedoms, which know better where to look for a Guido or a Titian, than for a dinner. Like others of his countrymen, he had been glad to flit round the glaring torch of English ostentation, flaming every winter in the high circles of Rome and Naples; and had eaten, drunk, and danced at the expense of the Great British, till he had almost begun to fancy their purse his own.

The only mode short of brigandry, to make it so permanently, he fancied, was by marrying an English heiress. It was an approved system. All the cities of the continent boast their duchesses and princesses, whose gold has purchased their way to Catholic toleration; and on hinting his views to the Hilsbys, a family of high-flying English, who dash their way to the Chiaja and back again almost every year of their lives, they had promised to launch him in the London world, and redeemed their promise, by a most flattering presentation to Lady Medwyn, a woman of high fashion, whom nobody had ever loved and everybody liked; one of those who, what is called, "say everything," and who consequently listen to nothing.

"And so, like the Lord in Knowles's play, you 'come here to be married?'" was her first salutation to Prince Massimo. "But, alas! heiresses are not so plentiful as they used to be, or are sooner snapt up. A dozen or two of the most valuable have been smuggled to the

continent already; and of those that remain, like the last birds of a last year's covey, they have been shot at till they are shy. However, after all the Hilsbys and nature have said and done in your favour, we must do our best for you. There is one charming creature lately come out. Do you care about charming creatures?"

"I was in hopes my eyes had rendered that question superfluous," was Mazzini's gallant reply.

"But unluckily," continued Lady Medwyn, who loved a bet far more than a compliment, "her heiressship is conditional. Her father's estates are unentailed."

"Of course, he would be content to settle them for an equivalent; for a high alliance for instance."

"No; he is himself one of the first noblemen in the kingdom."

"The first noblemen in *this* kingdom, per-

haps," added Prince Massimo, with an ineffable smile. "But under your favour, what sort of distinction is that?—The heralds of the empire will assure you that not a family of Great Britain can prove its sixteen quarterings. Luckily, however, the days of chivalry are past; and it matters little now-a-days whether, in the twelfth degree, one has the luck to inscribe a king or a cobbler."

"Then why suppose Lord Grandison likely to yield his daughter and estates to a penniless ancient title?"

"Because, though a man so highly descended as myself sets small account upon antiquity of nobility, *rôture*iers, like your English Lords, (for after all, with few exceptions, their recent ennoblement may be accounted *rôture*,) are apt to think more highly of it. It is amazing what absurd court I have seen paid by the English in Italy, to the mere semblance of rank;—really distressing—really humiliating. I have,

therefore, a right to conclude that a man like myself, whose ancestors headed the first crusade—”

“The crusades! ha, ha, ha, ha!—all that sort of thing is with us accounted melodrama,” cried Lady Medwyn, laughing heartily. “Such genealogies class, in our estimation, with childrens’ story-books—Mother Bunch, or *La Bibliothèque Bleue*. We have scarcely faith in anything anterior to the Reformation.”

“You will not, at least, deny your national predilection for high birth?”

“For rank—for *titles*. We never pause to inquire where they come from: we care for the bulk, not for the quality. I, for instance, am an earl’s daughter—a vicountess’s wife. If you were to kill me, I could not date the creation of either!—I can tell you after whom I walked at the coronation, because I shall never forget the effect produced on my risible faculties by old Lady Ravenswell’s overgrown coronet, perched on her bay wig; but whether Lord

Medwyn springs from a warrior, a statesman, or a retired haberdasher, believe me, I never was at the pains to inquire."

"If the latter, I suspect, Miladi would have been more than once unpleasantly reminded of the fact," replied Prince Massimo Mazzini, with a smile.

"Why, yes. I suppose if Lord Medwyn were a nobody, I should have him always parading on the subject of birth, and declaring himself the most aristocratic of the aristocratic. On the continent, people of family attach importance to such things ;—in England, *parvenues*. Look at the prodigious armorial bearings on the cits' carriages !—look at the seals sported by tradespeople !—and above all, listen to the holdings forth of the nobodies. That young Lapwing of the guards, who talked to you so learnedly last night about rouge-dragon and toison d'or, is the grandson of a ship's-chandler, or some such abomination."

"You think, then, that I have no chance of

bartering my old parchments for a rent-roll?" inquired the prince. "Well, I shall go back disappointed in my errand; but with the gratifying recollection of having been most hospitably welcomed by the most wonderful nation in the universe."

"What do you mean by wonderful?—I am convinced you use the word ironically."

"In the first place, as regards commerce. I shall never forget the impression made upon me by sailing up the Thames through whole fleets of trading vessels; besides passing, every half-minute, a steamer, which people seemed to call like a hackney coach from a stand; and, at length, arriving at a noble city standing in the midst of a forest of masts. That is what I meant by wonderful."

"Then, 'I guess,' you would find the 'go ahead' nation, with its eight hundred thousand miles of railroad, a 'tarnation' deal more 'wonderful' than ourselves," said Lady Medwyn, with a hearty laugh. "However, we *are* busy

little folks, and much obliged to you for the civility of noticing it. I even hope that we may deserve your better opinion by supplying you with an heiress. But to speak the truth, and in commercial language, princes are looking down among us; not exactly on account of the Reform Bill; on the contrary, government protests that nobility has risen in value since the views of the country became liberalized. But we have had some shocking specimens of foreign princes here; and John Bull, not very discriminating, and recollecting that he has been half a dozen times taken in by titled swindlers, is beginning to be suspicious in the wrong place. If you want to be well received, and looked upon as a safe man I recommend you, above all, to shave off your whiskers and mustachios."

Prince Massimo, already indignant at the cavalier tone assumed towards him by Lady Medwyn, reddened at this insinuation. He was a remarkably handsome fellow, very vain

of his personal appearance, and as tenacious of his beard as a Persian.

“I don’t mean to assert that it is absolutely necessary,” resumed Lady Medwyn, amused to see a flush gradually overspread his usually colourless cheek; “but I can assure you, that, with your present appearance, monied people will take you for an adventurer. We have had a dozen such among us, trading on their good looks, and with eminent success.”

It was, while still smarting under this rebuff, that Prince Massimo Mazzini was presented to the Delmaines, and received by the Countess and Lady Charlotte with the most flattering deference. There was something in his euphonous title that tickled the ear of the former; something in his fine person, that fascinated the eye of the latter. A prince, and a handsome prince, had every chance among such people. To be called “Princess!”—there was no resisting such a sound!—To take precedence of the Duchess of Eastlooe, the Marchioness of Gates-

head, and all the grandees of their set! To look down on Lady Medwyn, and have the entrées at court. Lady Charlotte flew to Godfrey's to secure a new bottle of salts, so languidly fine did she grow on the mere anticipation; and lifted up her glass contemptuously, even at her brother, the first time she passed him in the street.

Again and again was Prince Massimo Mazini invited to dine in Belgrave Square; till he must have been familiarly acquainted with the various devices on Lord Delmaine's costly dessert service of Worcester china. Lord Chichester liked the young foreigner. The travellers and the jockey set avouched him to be of unblemished descent; and there was everything in his really good manners and ingenuous curiosity concerning the country he was visiting, to recommend him to the young member. Chichester was conscious that when at Naples, some years before, *he* had evinced a far less laudable interest in the characteristics

of the land; that he had lived Englishwise among his own country-people; and that beyond Vesuvius, Pompeii, and Virgil's tomb, San Carlos and the carnivals, he had seen nothing of the capital of the two Sicilies. It was really a gratification to him, therefore, when the air of anxious attention and polite interjections of interest with which well-bred foreigners listen to the prosiest of stories, led him to believe that Massimo Mazzini was profoundly interested in the constitutional questions with which the young member was unsophisticated enough to bother his comprehension.

In the height, however, of Massimo's popularity in the family, just as Lady Medwyn was beginning to threaten him with forfeiture of caste if seen so often with the humdrum set in Belgrave Square, the Earl suddenly issued a decree that the Italian should be invited no more. Lady Delmaine naturally insisted upon knowing why; and on receiving a vague answer, which conveyed, and intended to convey no

information, she retired to her chamber for another severe fit of indisposition; and this time, Lady Charlotte was almost as well inclined to take to fillets of smelts and chickweed water, as herself.

Even to his son, Lord Delmaine did not deign to expound the motives of Massimo's exclusion. It was in vain that Lord Chichester wearied himself with asserting that the Prince was really a man of family—really a man of character. His father did not deny it. His father, before he was invited to Belgrave Square at all, had ascertained from the Neapolitan ambassador and the Foreign Office, all that poor Chichester was at such pains to render apparent. But to his son's representations he simply replied, "I don't choose to have my house infested by these d——d foreigners."

Such happened to be the phrase and tone in which Lord Delmaine had heard the Earl of Grandison decline, some nights before at a charity ball, the acquaintance of an Ionian

Count, with a pair of mustachios long enough to have made a sash-line, who had been pestering Lady Alicia de Wendover with his insolent attentions; and being a poor discriminator, his Lordship was of opinion that what was good for Peter was good for Paul; and that Massimo Mazzini was just as “d——d a foreigner” as Count Aldrocantaro Metrapodoros. It was his business to conciliate, at all cost, the father of Lady Alicia de Wendover—the proprietor of the Wilsmere woodlands; and as his Lordship remembered with regret, that on the very day of Lady Alicia’s dining in Belgrave Square with her father, the “d——d foreigner” had made his first appearance under Lady Medwyn’s patronage within his gates, he began to fear that the extreme coldness with which his overtures were received by Lord Grandison, arose from the alarm thus given to his parental caution. But it was not yet too late. The porter had his orders, and the Countess and his daughter theirs, and Prince Massimo Mazzini

was never again to be admitted in Belgrave Square.

Now, purposed incivility without a cause, or resulting from caprice, is a thing so utterly incomprehensible to a foreigner of any condition of life, that there was no danger the Prince should suspect the "not at home," with which he was daily accosted by Lord Delmaine's servants, to be the result of ill-will. He saw the knocker tied up. He understood that the Countess was seriously indisposed. He saw no Lady Charlotte Chichester at his nightly balls. And his object in frequenting the house being simply a lounge, (the matrimonial designs imputed to him by the young lady with the salt's bottle, never having entered his head), he quietly resigned himself to lose sight of the family till the family chose to recover its health, and resume its parties.

It is, in fact, one of the many happy results of the classification of society in the old countries of the continent, that the system of taking

up and letting down acquaintance, so common in England, is a rudeness undreamed of. Every person's place in society is so definite, the circle is comparatively so limited, and formed upon such fixed principles, that, except in cases of some enormous breach of propriety, no person, once established, can ever be expelled. Unless for cogent reasons, he would not have been there at all; and so often as the lady of the house receives visitors, he has a right to return there uninvited, and to be well received. There is no talk of "cutting." Such an outrage would reflect on the perpetrator rather than on the person "cut." There is no talk of "at home to the Count This, but not at home to the So-and-Sos." An exclusion of this kind would be classed among the flagrant acts of indecorum. All the vulgar caprices consequent upon a shifting state of society, in short, are unknown in those capitals where people meet, and eat ices, and play cards in the same apartments to-day where their

grandfathers and grandmothers met, ate ices, and played cards two or three centuries ago.

Lady Medwyn, meanwhile, who understood the phases of English impertinence somewhat better than the Prince, looked on, and was amused. She saw clearly that the Delmaines had closed their doors upon him—had “sent him to Coventry.” Why, she could not conceive;—unless he had been foolish enough to propose to Lady Charlotte. Now, she had explained to him, from the first, that Lady Charlotte was not a person to be proposed to; that she had not the one thing needful. If, therefore, in spite of her warning, Massimo had taken a fancy to the affected young lady, and committed himself, he deserved his fate and she did not pity him. Nay, he had committed her as well as himself; for she had pledged her word to the Hilsbys to marry him to an heiress—*her* word, which none of the fashionable world ever took the liberty of disputing; and it would have been a downright insult to

her authority had he contented himself, *pour tout potage*, with the grand-daughter of a Glasgow weaver, having a miserable pittance of fifteen or twenty thousand pounds.

As the Prince had evidently no suspicion that he was what *la jeune France* calls *éconduit*, (that is, bowed to the door of the ante-chamber by the master—a ceremony which, unless when paid to a royal personage, is a signification to return no more,) she was careful not to enlighten him or draw forth the remarks of others; as the report of his having been refused might be a serious obstacle to his eventual success with Lady Alicia de Wenderover. She affected, on the contrary, to believe him, when he stated that he never went to Belgrave Square now, “*parce que cette pauvre chère Comtesse était victime d’une maladie de langueur,*” and occupied herself with finding a better opening for him elsewhere.

Her Ladyship, on her own part, had succeeded in making her peace with the Gransdens:

there were few things, in fact, to which she made up her mind in which she did not succeed; and in addition to inveigling the Viscountess as much as possible to her house, she now determined to introduce Prince Massimo Mazzini into that of the Viscountess, as a shorter cut than Belgrave Square, to the acquaintance of Lady Alicia de Wendover.

## CHAPTER II.

There are a set of malicious, prating, prudish gossips, both male and female, who murder characters to kill time ; and will rob a young fellow of his good name before he has years to know the value of it.

SHERIDAN.

“ I CAN’T make out,” said the Dowager, one morning, as she sat occupying her favourite post of observation, to Lady Meliora, who was busy behind her tapestry frame, decyphering the inuendos contained in the preceding Sunday’s newspaper, which she had borrowed from Mrs. Crouch,—“ I can’t make out who the foreigner can be who has been coming so often of late to the Gransdens.”

“ How do you know that it *is* a foreigner ?”

“ By the cut of his mustachios and coat.”

“ I dare say it is Mrs. Vere’s courier. Though she has been in England six months, she affects to retain her foreign servants.”

“ No, it is not a courier.”

“ How can you tell, Ma’am?—There is no difference now-a-days between the dress of gentlemen and their servants; except indeed, that contrary to old custom, the gentlemen seem to wear their valet’s cast off clothes.”

“ I don’t judge by personal appearance, Lady Meliora, lest, as I am not fond of finery, I should be judged by it myself. But if this man were a menial, Lord Gransden’s butler would address him less deferentially.”

“ Then I dare say it is some Opera singer. Lady Gransden, you know, is bit with the prevailing music-madness; and perhaps this man may come to her house so often to convert the trio into a quartette.”

“ By no means, I assure you. There never is a note of music going on while he remains

in the house. The drawing-room windows have been regularly opened every morning, since the beginning of May—I can answer for the fact.”

“ Perhaps it is one of the corps diplomatique.”

“ I think not. One knows *them* by sight. The corps diplomatique are as inevitable at all the parties of the season, as Gunter’s ices. No! it is certainly not one of the corps diplomatique.”

“ Mrs. Wilson desired me to inquire of your Ladyship, on what morning it would be convenient for your Ladyship’s dressing-room chimney to be swept, my Lady?” inquired Vaux, who had entered the room on tip-toes to deliver a note to Lady Meliora, with the intention of picking up any thing that fell in his way of the Dowager’s private conversation with her daughter.

“ On Friday or Saturday ;—or, let me see—tell Wilson I will speak to her about it. Walk

this way, Vaux, and pray tell me whether you happen to know the name of the gentleman who is knocking at Lord Gransden's door?"

"The gentleman in the dust-coloured gaiters, my Lady?"

"There is but one."

"No, my Lady, I can't say as I do. It is no one as visits here; and I'm not in the habit of asking questions out of your Ladyship's establishment. It warn't countenanced by none of the gentlemen where I've lived. It warn't considered respectable. I dare say, my Lady, Mary the housemaid might happen to know; because, as I once mentioned to your Ladyship, her brother lives groom with Lord Gransden. Shall I send her up, my Lady?"

"No. It is no manner of consequence, I thought the gentleman bowed to me, and that it was an acquaintance. Go down, Vaux."

And just as Mr. Vaux expected, scarcely had he reached the housekeeper's room, to enjoy a laugh with Mrs. Wilson over the incor-

rigible prying of the Dowager, when the drawing-room bell rang twice, and the housemaid, unused to appear in those hallowed precincts at that hour of the day, except once a-year, or to receive a reprimand for a duster left forgotten in a corner or the dust on a marble console, trembled as she tied on a clean apron to be "carpeted" by the Countess.

"It is a very extraordinary thing, Mary," the Dowager began, the moment the poor frightened woman made her appearance, "that I can never induce you to obey my orders about apprizing me when you have accidentally broken the china or any of the little ornaments about the room!"

"Indeed, my Lady, whenever I have been unlucky, I always make it a pint to mention it to Mrs. Wilson."

"That cracked dragon, for instance. Did you ever inform me that it had lost an ear?"

"Oh! dear, my Lady! Surely your Ladyship must remember that the white dragon

had but one ear when I came into your Ladyship's service? I remember, as well as if it war yesterday, when I war going over the rooms the first morning with the housekeeper, says I, ' Mrs. Wilson, I hope Ma'am you'll be pleased to remark that there is sun stains in the crimson silk curtains—that the muslin curtains is shamefully darned in more places nor one,—that the hallublaster wares is as yellow as a guinea, and that the chayney dragon have had its right ear cimented on and won't be like to last whole, no time."

" Enough, enough—I don't want to be troubled with these foolish particulars; you must come to an understanding about it with Mrs. Wilson. You are often at Lord Gransden's, I find?"

" Oh! dear no, my Lady. They belied me to your Ladyship as said so. I can assure you, my Lady, that if there warn't no greater company-keepers in the house than I am—"

" But your brother, I understand, is in his

Lordship's establishment; and though it is a rule in my house to admit no followers, yet in the case of such near relationship—"

"I'm sure I'm humbly obliged to your Ladyship," replied Mary, curtseying. "Sartainly, so far as asking brother now and then to step in of an evening after a hard day's work, and chat for half an hour in the still-room, when I was looking up the house linen for Mrs. Wilson—"

"Well, well—I dare say, Mrs. Wilson made no objection, and I am sure *I* don't!"—cried the Dowager, disgusted with the circumstantiality of Mary, who would have been instantly dismissed had not her gossiping promised 'more hereafter.' "But I want to know whether you ever happened to hear your brother mention the name of a gentleman who—your brother attends Lady Gransden, I fancy, in her rides?"

"*Lady Gransden*, my Lady?"

"Yes—Lord Gransden's wife—the lady

who lives opposite," explained the Dowager, in compassion to her housemaid's stultified looks.

"Lord bless you, my Lady!—John havn't been in my Lord's service these five weeks. John had a few words with Mr. Smith, my Lord's head groom, about the accident, 'cause some mischievous person had put it into Mr. Smith's head as my brother must have been misusing the horse, which wasn't by no means 'customed to rear; only it happened that day when brother was riding it, that as ill-luck would have it, Punch—"

"In short, your brother does not live any longer with Lord and Lady Gransden?"

"Oh! dear no, my Lady. He's got an excellent place (thirty guineas and three suits a-year, washing and beer-money,) with Sir Jonathan Bell, the great counsellor, in Bloomsbury Square; and John tells me—"

"I'm glad to hear he has got a good situation. But if you've any regard for your

brother, Mary, don't tempt him to come idling his time to the west end of the town, which only leads to drinking and low company."

"The Vest end leads to drinking and low company, my Lady?"—demanded the astonished housemaid. But her vocation was gone. Her brother lived in Bloomsbury Square. She had no longer any thing to tell about Lady Gransden; and her Ladyship instantly recalled to mind that she was only Mary the housemaid, and ignominiously dismissed her to the lower regions. It was only very provoking to the Dowager, that she should have taken the trouble to have recourse to the broken ear of the white dragon, by way of extorting information, which she might as well have attempted to extract out of the door-knocker.

Ere she had recovered her vexation, or heard to an end the lecture vouchsafed her by Lady

Meliora, Johnny Chichester looked in, with his hat upon his head.

“I am going to meet Grandison at Chalon’s, and beg you will not wait dinner for me to-day,” said he; “I dine with the Langleys.”

“You might just as well have told me so last night. Poor Wilson sent up twice to know whether you dined at home—something about some red mullets.”

“Ay, ay!—I dare say she intended to serve you some red mullets, in case I dined out; because she knows I am apt to play the *gourmand* with my favourite dish. My compliments to Wilson, and two will do to-day.”

“Nonsense. But what has Lord Grandison to do at Chalon’s? Is Lady Alicia sitting for her picture? For whom, pray? Going to be married, I suppose?—No. Then I’ll lay my life she is to be in the Book of Beauty—the Young Lady’s Yearly Advertiser. How is she to be drawn?”

“She is neither to be drawn nor quartered. We are going to Chalon’s to see Lady Gransden’s picture.”

“Ah! it is Lady Gransden, then, who is to figure in the Annual?”

“Neither figure nor face, I assure you. Her picture is a birthday present for her mother; and Lady Alicia is anxious that her father—”

“Do come this way a moment,” cried the Dowager, interrupting him. “Can you tell me the name of the gentleman just coming out of Lord Gransden’s house?”

“That man in the green coat, whose white face and black mustachios look like the ebony and ivory of a draught-board? Yes! I believe I can inform you,” replied Johnny, unable to resist his desire to baffle the inquisitive propensities of his mother, and certain that should she discover the stranger to be Lady Charlotte Chichester’s Prince Massimo, she would ground a whole catechism on the fact. “But it is a profound secret,” he continued, lowering his voice

to a more confidential tone ;—" a secret which, should it transpire, might be productive of the most serious evils to Church and State, in this and other nations."

" God bless my soul !" cried the Dowager, sorting out a better pair of glasses from her table-drawer, for the examination of the mysterious stranger ; while Lady Meliora, having carefully laid out of sight her newspaper, crept round to the window, and peeped from behind the crimson silk curtains, the plight of which had been so strenuously pointed out by poor Mary. " There certainly *is* something very peculiar about him," murmured the old lady, after a minute investigation.

" You may well say so !" answered Johnny, in the same tone. " Quiet and inoffensive as he now appears, that man is supposed to have massacred more victims with his single hand, than any other individual attached to the army of Don Carlos !"

" A Spaniard ?—We might have guessed as

much from his complexion," observed Lady Meliora. "Is he a political refugee?"

"The unavowed plenipotentiary of the Carlisle in this country, supposed to be charged with a secret mission to the Carlton Club," replied Johnny, with earnest solemnity. "The Conservatives know more of this Don Sanchez Gaspardo di Torres Vedras, than they care to own. It is said that he has unlimited credit upon two of the leading city bankers; and when seen coming out of Apsley House, the Stock Exchange confesses the influence of the visit."

"And *is* he seen coming out of Apsley House?" inquired the Dowager, quitting the window, now that Mazzini was out of sight.

"Have you not yourself seen him quit Lord Gransden's—who, you informed me yesterday, was thoroughly in the hands of the Tories?"

"It is altogether a very mysterious affair," mused the Dowager; when Johnny, rejoicing in the success of his mystification, had stolen off

to rejoin Lord Grandison. "I was sure there was some mischief on foot, when I heard of Lady Medwyn and the Duke of East Looe laying such close siege to Lord Gransden and Lord Chichester. Goodness defend me! if they should get hold of young Chichester, as they did of Lord Ranelagh, and induce *him* to volunteer in the cause of Don Carlos, what a stroke for his family!—An only son, and with such expectations! After all the care and anxieties of Lord and Lady Delmaine, to have it come to that!"

"But it is not come to that *yet*," calmly rejoined Lady Meliora. "I consider it far more likely that he will join Lady Gransden in persuading *the Viscount* to volunteer. Consider," she added, with a sneer, "that poor Lord Chichester has to attend to his duties in parliament."

"A secret emissary of Don Carlos!" again ejaculated the Dowager, unable at once to recover the shock of becoming depository of such

a secret. "This might be considered very important intelligence at the Foreign Office. But I'm sure I don't know why I should trouble myself to render a service to Lord Palmerston, who would see me hanged before he showed the smallest civility to *me*. I wrote to him once to get Wilson's brother-in-law appointed Consul at Lima, and he never so much as answered my letter ; and last year, when we spent a month within two miles of Broadlands, he had not even the civility to ask us to dinner!"

"Besides," observed Lady Meliora, "the thing was confided to us by my brother ; and we are by no means certain to what extent he might be compromised, should the secret transpire."

"Nonsense, nonsense!—you very well know that Johnny could never suffer by any catastrophe occurring to the Tories. My son's politics are heinously liberal. Mrs. Crouch does not hesitate to call him a virulent Radical."

“I suspect the business was confided to him by Lord Chichester,” resumed Lady Meliora; “in which case, it really might not be amiss to inflict some punishment on the young man’s dereliction from the family principles.”

“We will think of it,” replied the Dowager, ringing for Otley, to prepare for her daily drive. “Nothing material can take place without our knowledge. I have my eye constantly on Lady Gransden. Not a soul goes into her house or comes out of it without my knowledge; and should I see anything unusual carried in, (anything, for instance, resembling concealed arms to be exported to the army in Spain,) rely upon it, no silly promise to my son shall prevent my placing the discovery in the hands of the government. What a mercy it may prove, that the Gransdens were induced to take a house in Upper Grosvenor Street!”

“Supposing we go and see Lady Mary; I want to tell her that her candidate for admission into the Blind School was the last on the

list," said Lady Meliora, as they were stepping into the carriage. "She ought to know it; for the father is a constituent of Mr. Langley's; and I know they were anxious the girl should succeed. But what signifies being anxious, if people won't take the trouble to go through the requisite canvass."

"I am aware that Sarah Smith failed this time," was Lady Mary Langley's reply, on receiving her sister's friendly intelligence. "A candidate seldom succeeds till the third attempt; but my poor protégée has friends who are determined not to give up the point." And Lady Meliora perceived her sister look so significantly at a heavy-looking woman with two thick daughters, who were sitting in Eaton Square when they arrived, that, for *their* edification, as interested in the matter, she could not help adding—

"Well, I'm sure I hope poor Sarah Smith has those sufficiently anxious in her favour to take some trouble. You know I repeatedly

warned you and Cecilia, that unless you wrote *separate* solicitations—backed by recommendations from *friends*—to *all* the governors—you had not the *smallest* chance of getting the poor girl in.”

“ And you may remember I answered that, were we to write a thousand notes of solicitation, the result would be the same;—all the votes not engaged to us, being previously promised.”

Lady Meliora, however, chose to persist in her accusations; and her sister, aware how little was to be gained in such a case, checked the conversation by remaining wisely silent. But when the heavy woman and her two thick daughters had taken their departure, Lady Mary explained to her sister that she was wife to the mayor of the county-town of the shire represented by Mr. Langley, and that Sarah Smith was unluckily a protégée of the mayor.

“ I fear she will make mischief out of your

remarks, on her return to the country," said Lady Mary, mildly.

"How could I possibly surmise that she had the smallest interest in the case?" retorted her sister. "It all arises from your bad habit of not introducing people. It may be very well for the Duchess of East Looe, Lady Gateshead, and people of that class, not to introduce; because, in their circles, the whole society is acquainted. But in the house of a county member!—How is it possible for any one to know all the quizzes who abound in the house of a county member?"

"It was for that very reason I did not introduce Mrs. Threlkeld to you. When staying at Langley Park, you have so often complained of the promiscuous society we are compelled to receive."

"Certainly. In a country-house, where one sees people all day long, it would have been a great nuisance to know your Mrs. Threlkeld. But as I am never likely to see her face again

in London, here it would not have signified a straw. Pray where is Cecilia?—Doesn't she choose to show, when you are receiving your country constituents?"

"Poor girl! She is suffering from a bad head-ache this morning, and is lying down."

"At Almacks last night, I suppose?" interrupted the Dowager, throwing down some specimens of work she had taken from the table to examine. "You should not let the poor girl stay so late at balls. It is dreadful bad style, particularly during her first season, to be seen drinking the dregs of every second-rate cotillon."

"Cis never danced the cotillon in her life. We never stay any where after supper, on account of being in time for her father's breakfast at ten; and last night, we did not even go to Almacks. Cecilia was so poorly all the morning, that I sent back our tickets."

"I dare say she laces too tight. Girls with small waists are always suffering from

head-aches!" observed Lady Meliora, good-naturedly.

"But Cecilia does not lace at all. Don't you remember how angry you used to be about it last year at Langley Park?—how you fancied she was growing awry, and how my mother insisted upon sending to London for a corset for her?"

"Well, that corset may be the cause of the mischief!" cried Lady Delmaine.

"But she never wore it!"

"*That* was grateful of her, after all the trouble taken by the grandmamma!" cried Lady Meliora.

"Her father has always interdicted stays. Mr. Langley considers exercise and riding a far more important assistance to the shape."

"Upon my honour, I think Mr. Langley would do far better to attend to his public business than interfere with his daughter's toilet!" sneered the Dowager.

“ Have you sent for Sir Lucius Flimsy to her ? ” inquired Lady Meliora.

“ A physician ?—Thank God she is not at present so much indisposed as to need advice,” said Lady Mary. “ Hot rooms and too much dancing, I fancy, nothing more ! She will be as well as ever when we get down to Langley Park.”

“ It will be one while before *that*, I can tell you ! ” cried the Dowager. “ Johnny assures me it will be the longest session ever known.”

“ If she were to get worse then, I would take her down for a week to Brighton,” said Lady Mary, not to be terrified by all these evil prognostications. “ But I am sure nothing of the kind will be necessary.”

“ Can I see her ?—Shall I go up to her ? ” inquired Lady Meliora, fancying that the whole truth was not yet explained.

“ I believe we had better leave her to herself. The heat of the weather makes her nervous.”

“Nervous!—at eighteen!—You had better follow Lady Delmaine’s example at once, and consult the Somnabulist!” cried the Dowager.

“No, for I have not the least faith in the Somnabulist; and am convinced that a cool quiet room is the best remedy for a nervous head-ache.”

“I see how it is, and I have suspected it for some time!” exclaimed Lady Meliora. “Cecilia is in love!”

“I hope not; for I will not vouch that *such* a malady is curable by a cool quiet room,” replied Lady Mary Langley, with a smile. “But what makes you imagine such a thing, which I confess, never entered my head.”

“It never *does* enter the heads of fathers or mothers, till too late,” added the Dowager.

“In the first place, her age makes it exceedingly likely,” added Lady Meliora. “In

the next, how do you know that she had not taken a fancy to one or other of the men whom you were boasting the other day you had refused for her?"

"If that be your supposition, I am satisfied!" cried Lady Mary, cheerfully. "Both were rejected at Cecilia's particular desire."

"And Lord Chichester? Have you rejected *him* at Cecilia's particular desire?" retorted Lady Meliora.

"He has not proposed," replied Lady Mary, coolly.

"No, nor ever will, though I am convinced you have been expecting nothing else for the last three months."

"I will not answer for others; but I can assure you that *I* am guiltless of any such expectation," replied Lady Mary. "I am aware, indeed, that the Delmaines have other views for their son."

"What signify *their* views?—Lord Chi-

chester has an attachment—a decided attachment.”

“ I sincerely trust it is worthy of him,” said Lady Mary, striving to speak with composure—“ for we have seen a great deal of him, and he is a young man in whose happiness I am interested.”

“ And Cissy, too, depend upon it.”

“ I hope not,” replied the mother, unable wholly to repress a change of colour. “ For such an attachment might become a source of great misery to my poor girl.”

“ Then why not check it at once? Why allow her to be lying down and complaining of head-aches, and fancying herself fifty times worse than she is, when she ought to be dancing at Almacks, or riding in the park? Can’t you understand the disadvantage it would be to your daughter, if it came to be said about London, ‘ What’s the matter with Cissy Langley, that one never sees her now?’

‘ Oh! don’t you know?—She is desperately in love with her cousin, Lord Chichester, and he has thrown her over!’ ”

“ But he has *not* thrown her over. Chichester never paid her more than the common attentions of a cousin ; and you have no cause to say that she is desperately in love !”

“ It is not what *I* say. It is what other people will surmise.”

“ Neither of them are of sufficient consequence to set the curiosity of the world into a ferment.”

“ Don’t allow Cecilia to imagine that! Let her suppose that people’s curiosity *is* excited. Let her suppose it her duty to exert herself. Let her not have a minute’s leisure to indulge in dangerous reveries and romantic reminiscences !

“ God knows, poor child, she is any thing but romantic ;” said Lady Mary, “ and I have many reasons for flattering myself you are

mistaken. At all events, dear sister, be not offended if I intreat you to abstain from making to others the remarks which I am bound to believe you are instigated by kind motives in making to *me*."

Lady Meliora reddened. Conscience "did make a coward of her!" for she knew that her motives were any thing but kind; and that she had already confided to Lady Dearmouth, Mrs. Crouch, and Sir Jacob Appleby, her conviction that Cissy Langley was dying in love for her flirting, dissipated cousin, Lord Chichester.

To screen her confusion, she reminded the Dowager, that they had a visit owing to Mrs. Vere, who resided in the neighbourhood; and poor Mrs. Vere, who detested Lady Meliora and her mother for the same motive which caused them to be held in abhorrence by her brother, Sir Henry Windsor, had only just time, on espying the Chichester liveries, to

issue a sentence, the frequency of which might induce one to suppose the English the most gadding people in the universe, i. e. the favourite and most deceptive veto of “not at home.”

## CHAPTER III.

Great God of love, that with thy cruel darts  
Dost conquer greatest conquerors on ground,  
And set'st thy kingdom in the captive hearts  
Of kings and Cæsars to thy service bound ;  
What glory or what guerdon hast thou found  
In feeble ladies tyrannizing sore ?  
And adding anguish to the bitter wound  
With which their lives thou tamedst long afore,  
By heaping storms of trouble on them, daily more.

SPENSER.

LADY Mary Langley, usually so happy when left alone, sat down dispirited and forlorn on the departure of her visitors. The Dowager's cutting remarks seemed to have suddenly enlightened her mind. She was beginning to see matters around her in a new point of view.

She was beginning to reflect that she was mother to a daughter of eighteen, and to tremble at the reflection.

If, after all, the Dowager and Lady Meliora should be right. If her darling child should be suffering from the pangs of wounded affection—of hopeless passion—of unrequited love ; what a prospect for her on whose young heart not a sorrow had ever yet shed its withering influence—for whom life had been a garden of flowers—a dream of holy and gratified attachment !—Father, mother, brother—all doted upon her. Other girls might shine in a ball-room, and adorn the festivals of a court ; but it was at home that Cecilia was appreciated—it was at Langley she was worshipped—it was in the bosom of her family she dwelt a ministering angel !

And if all this should be in vain. If she should be fated to a life of disappointment ! Lady Mary could appreciate the effects of disappointment on a kind and tender heart.

Under similar circumstances, her good brother had undergone a moral wreck, by which his whole nature was metamorphosed. But Cecilia's dispositions were of a still softer nature; and a blow, such as had tortured poor John Chichester, would, perhaps, seal the fate of his niece.

Lady Mary cast her eyes round the room and shuddered. A thousand secrets seemed revealed to her in that single glance! *There* stood Cecilia's favourite instrument—which she *now* recollected had been for days, almost for weeks, suffered to remain untouched. *There* lay her portfolio—with dust gathering on the edges. *There* her work-box, of late made a pretext of occupation, perhaps only to conceal her anxious looks and tearful eyes. How, how could all this have so long escaped the notice of the tenderest of mothers?

For a moment, Lady Mary hesitated what system to pursue; whether, still pretending ignorance, to follow the Dowager's advice, rally Cecilia into cheerfulness, and insist upon

her defying the suspicions of the world, by rushing into the pleasures of society; or whether to seek her child, and, as on all previous occasions, appeal to her principles and feelings. Nature decided the dilemma. Lady Mary feeling that it would be *impossible* to dissemble with one to whom her whole soul was open—that the first moment they were alone together, all her mind would escape her lips, judged it desirable to choose the present moment for the inevitable explanation. She accordingly hurried up to the chamber of her daughter.

For the first time in her life, she paused as she approached it. Cissy Langley was so natural a person, that no management had hitherto been required in dealing with her. All had been unreserve betwixt her and her parents; yet now, alas! Lady Mary understood the possibility that concealments might arise. With this feeling, she scarcely liked to go in. She felt as if she had lost her child.

Cecilia was no longer in her eyes the light-hearted young girl, whom she was sure to surprise singing as she sat at work ; or silent only because reading some favourite book—one of those golden treasures of the library on which the young eye lingers earliest and latest, seeking it the oftener and loving it the more that every line is known by heart.

Lady Mary felt persuaded that she should not *now* be greeted by a smiling face—a murmured song. And she was right. On crossing the threshold, the air struck heavy and close upon her quickened respiration. The Venetian blinds were down, the windows closed. There was neither song nor sound stirring ; and though the fond mother had intentionally exaggerated in order to prevent Lady Meliora's purposed visit, by saying that she was lying down, Cecilia was not the less a sufferer, because she had found courage to dress herself as usual, and sat working at her favourite table,

on the vain pretext of amusing herself by embroidering a note-book for her brother.

She was going to rise, according to her custom, on her mother's entrance into the room; but Lady Mary was by her side ere she could move, and drew a chair to the table with the intention of speaking, in her usual tone, on ordinary subjects. But no sooner did Cissy Langley raise her eyes from her work, the better to listen to the least word uttered by her mother, than Lady Mary, on reading in her heavy eye-lids confirmation of her worst fears, threw her arms suddenly round her neck and burst into tears. It was the mother, not the daughter, who wept; because the affliction which moved those broken sobs was that of her child.

Cecilia's first impulse was to clasp her mother caressingly round the neck, and inquire the cause of her distress. But this was impossible. She would not feign ignorance.

Knowing that she was herself in trouble—deep heartfelt trouble—she could not for a moment doubt that Lady Mary had at length discovered the origin of her illness, and was offering her, at least, the solace of her tears.

There was no need of much explanation between them. “Why did you not confide in me?” was Lady Mary’s first exclamation; and Cissy as frankly replied, “I knew not that I had anything to tell, till all these reports about him made me aware that I had suffered my feelings to be engaged, without knowing how or wherefore.”

“At all events, my dear child, my own Cecilia—for your father’s sake, for mine—for your own—let me trust that you will not wantonly indulge in feelings of disappointment, of which I cannot but blame myself as in part the origin. I ought to have anticipated this. I ought not to have allowed this young man to become so intimately domesticated

among us. I might have known—I *did* know—that his family intended him to form a more brilliant connexion.”

“Mother!” interrupted Cissy Langley, laying her burning hand on Lady Mary’s, “you know I have no reserves from you. I cannot recollect that ever in my life I concealed a thought or feeling from your knowledge. You will believe me, therefore, when I assure you, that you exaggerate the degree to which my feelings are affected. I have seldom thought much about love—never in reference to myself. When Sir George Vavasor and Lord Nithsdale wished to make themselves acceptable to me, I felt that I did not like them—I told you so; and *that* seemed all the consideration it was necessary to give to the matter. But if I am to judge from my reading, I am not what is called in love with my cousin Chichester.”

And as the poor girl spoke, she smiled so

mournful a smile, that Lady Mary saw at once she was not altogether to be trusted with the analysis of her own feelings.

“ Rely not too much on the impressions you derive on such subjects from books,” replied her mother. “ Works that treat of the passions and their influence, are those of poets and novelists ;—chartered enthusiasts—lawful exaggerators. Every-day experience, my own Cis, is a safer teacher ; and I feel it my duty to tell you, that the love whose influence I have seen most potent over the human mind, is not the passion of rhapsodies and sonnets ; but just such a calm, holy tenderness—born unsuspected, and cherished undivulged—which your intimacy with your cousin has, I fear, been the means of calling forth. But it is not, because I admit frankly the extent of the danger, that you will indulge in regrets which, believe me, may be soothed, nay, *extinguished*, by steadfast self-controul.”

Cissy Langley’s reply was a prolonged kiss

upon her mother's cheek. "Trust to me, mother," said she, in a low whisper, "I will not disgrace you. I will not harass you with superfluous anxieties. Give me a little time—a very little time—and all shall be forgotten—all shall be as before. But you will let me talk about all this to you, won't you?—Be not afraid of sentimental confidences. I should like just to make a clear breast of all my sorrows—all my follies—and then dismiss the subject for ever."

Lady Mary felt easier as, with her daughter's hand clasped within her own, she listened; for a smile gradually overspread the sweet face of Cecilia, as if rejoicing in this opportunity of breaking through her previous reserve.

"I am sure you must remember, dear mother," said she, "the sort of joking that took place at Langley, between my uncle and Augustus, previous to Chichester's return from his travels, about family matches, and setting my cap at my handsome cousin, and all the idle

jects that are apt to pass among young people on such subjects. I laughed with them at the time—laughed, precisely because I had not a thought of the kind—either with regard to Chichester or any other person. But I perfectly well recollect your checking Augustus, by saying that nothing could be more absurd, or more mischievous in families, than to excite suspicions and embarrassments on such subjects; and my father once grew almost angry with my uncle Johnny for persisting, in spite of your remonstrance.”

“ I remember it well,” replied Lady Mary, in a low voice.

“ Well—when Chichester really returned to England, I felt almost uncomfortable at the prospect of seeing him again, so anxious was I lest any of the remarks made in our own household upon the eligibility of our marriage, should have reached his ears. He came, however, and I forgot my apprehensions. His frank easy manners soon convinced me, that whatever he

might have heard, had not displeased him. And I was instantly comfortable in his society—instantly able to enjoy his pleasant, cheerful conversation ; and admire, in his patience with his tiresome family, all his natural kindness of heart. I believe, however, I might have wanted tact or zeal to discover all these good qualities, but for the perpetual disparagement of my brother. Augustus was constantly attacking him ; and mere charity towards the absent engaging me as constantly in his defence, I grew, at last, to be always studying his merits, in order to cite them in his behalf. You smile, dear mother. Yes, *indeed*, such was the first cause of Chichester's occupying so large a share in my thoughts."

"Don't be too sure, my poor Cis, that you are able to account for that part of the matter," replied Lady Mary, fondly pressing her hand.

"He seemed so delighted to be with us at Langley Park," resumed her daughter. "He

used to refer so affectionately to the days when we were all children together. He so often expressed a wish that his sister Charlotte were more like me, to be a companion for him ;—that instead of being educated by a French governess, she had been brought up by such a mother as mine. Above all things, *that*—mother ! Chichester was never weary of expressing admiration of papa and you. I have heard him say, a thousand times, that he wished to make my father the model of his political life.”

“ Ah ! Cecilia ; if you were to take to your heart all those who have made similar declarations—”

“ That he was proud of being connected with him,” continued Miss Langley, not heeding the interruption ; “ that if required by any foreigner to point out a model-mansion of the true old English style of living, in its best perfection, he should at once name Langley Park. He proved it, too ;—for whenever not detained by peremptory engagements at home, you

know my cousin was always coming to us uninvited."

"Yes; and we were imprudent enough to receive him with open arms. Your father thought him a good object of emulation for Augustus. Whatever Chichester seemed to think worth knowing, your brother was at the pains to study. We did not reflect, as we ought, upon what might be the consequences of his frequent visits to yourself."

"And if it never occurred to *you*, dearest mamma, how was such a suspicion likely to present itself to *me*?—When we came to London this year, I confess I felt the greatest joy at the prospect of our season in town; but I never dreamt, I never surmised, that my cousin had any share in my satisfaction no, not even when my heart beat with delight at hearing you settle with grandmamma to meet the Delmaines at her house, on the express avowal of yours and my father's wish to be on better terms with them. I tried to make ac-

quaintance with, and conciliate Lady Charlotte, flattering myself that I made the attempt only to further your wishes."

"And what, then, first rendered you more clear-sighted to the state of your feelings?" demanded Lady Mary.

"I can scarcely tell. Not the report related to us by grandmamma, that Chichester, by the desire of his family, was paying his addresses to Lady Alicia de Wendover; for though certainly startled by the intelligence, when I came to reflect upon it, nothing seemed more natural than that the Delmaines, who are such heartless people, should force him into a *mariage de convenance*. There was nothing to mortify me in the fact. It was no fault of mine that I was not born an heiress; and as to Alicia herself, she is so beautiful, so attractive, so likely to confer happiness on those fated to depend upon her cheerful temper and affectionate disposition, that I could not desire a happier destiny for my cousin. By the time my aunt

Meliora mentioned the subject to me a second time, I was able to listen without much emotion; and when she talked of it again and again, and grandmamma joined with her in a tone which I fancied (forgive me mother) was intended for my mortification, my spirits rallied, and I really was able, at last, to talk gaily about his marriage, and consider what an addition Lord and Lady Chichester, settled near us, would be to our society."

"I suspect, my dear Cis," interrupted Lady Mary, with a smile, "that your composure on the subject arose from the information afforded by your uncle Johnny, of the extreme unlikelihood that our friend Lord Grandison would sanction the match."

"No, indeed, and indeed, I believed that it would take place; and the more I saw of dear Alicia, the more satisfied I was that she was likely to render happy the object of her choice. Chichester was the same to me as ever; that is, he was kinder and more attentive

than ever; probably because grateful to you for your goodness towards Lady Alicia. In short, I was quite satisfied. But about a week ago—mother! I scarcely like to tell you the rest.”

Lady Mary said not a word to extract the secret of that young heart; but turned away to afford time for Cecilia’s gathering emotions to subside.

“About a week ago,” resumed Miss Langley, again taking Lady Mary’s hand firmly within her own, “one morning when you were away, and Augustus was sitting reading to me while I worked, grandmamma came in, and immediately began exclaiming, that it was all over with Chichester—that he was on the verge of public disgrace—that he must be challenged by Lord Gransden, and afterwards dismissed from all decent society: that not even his nearest relations would be justified in continuing their notice of him. I trembled so violently that I had not courage to ask why. From the tone

assumed by grandmamma, and Augustus's repeated and almost angry entreaties to her to forbear, I felt convinced that there was something indelicate in the mystery. At length, in spite of all my brother could do to check her communication, grandmamma informed us, that my cousin had formed an improper attachment for Lady Gransden—for a married woman—for the wife of his friend. Oh mother!—judge what I felt at hearing him so miserably degraded, so utterly disgraced. Think of the treachery of such conduct—think of its results !”

Lady Mary hesitated ; but she felt that her hesitation was unworthy. Convinced of the utter groundlessness of her mother and sister's charges against Lord Chichester—charges which they were in the habit of making without the slightest foundation concerning half their acquaintance—her first impulse was to exclaim, “Acquit your cousin, he is guiltless in this thing.” But a moment's consideration brought to mind that the surest cure for poor Cecilia's

infatuation—an infatuation certain to end in disappointment and misery—would be her continuance in her present error. Lord Chichester, worthless and degraded, must soon be dismissed from her affections.

A blush of self-accusation, however, reminded Lady Mary that even passive duplicity was unpardonable; that she had no right, even for the sake of a beloved daughter, to trifle with the good name of another; and she accordingly entered into Lord Chichester's defence with such honest zeal, as to be almost terrified by the effects of her communication. Cecilia, usually so gentle, so placid, started up, and threw her arms wildly around her mother's neck.

"You are *certain* that there is no foundation for this shameful report?"—cried she. "You are *convinced* of my cousin's innocence?"

"Perfectly so."

"Oh! thank God, thank God!"—cried the poor girl, drawing a deep breath. "Be not

alarmed, mother. Do not fancy that my eagerness springs from—from any sentiment that ought to render you uneasy. Be assured that I am only rejoicing because my cousin—my old playfellow, is exonerated; be assured that were any other equally old friend placed in the same circumstances, I should feel equally gratified by his exculpation. I am quite sincere, mother—do not shake your head, and look so anxious!—Trust me, that if your words are confirmed—that if the rumour proves to be mere scandal—you will not have a moment's further cause for uneasiness on my account! I shall have no more head-aches;—I shall recover my spirits. I am quite ready to accompany you to L—— House this very night!"

But while Cecilia's words remained so incoherent, and Cecilia's hands continued to tremble so violently as she pressed those of her mother, Lady Mary felt it difficult to be quite at ease. After the shock her daughter's spirits had sustained, it might be as well to

make no further remark to this effect. But Lady Mary felt the imperative necessity of weaning the poor girl from every association likely to increase an attachment at once so hopeless, and so much more deeply seated than she had supposed.

To return to Langley Park would be as ill-advised as to remain in town. In London, there was the hourly chance of meeting; in the country, the daily probability of Lord Chichester's claiming their hospitality uninvited, according to his previous custom. To break through this established habit, would be to compromise the poor girl. There was no possible pretext, short of direct offence, for keeping Lord Chichester away.

For a moment, it occurred to Lady Mary to propose to her family a tour on the continent. They might remain away till the solemnization of Lord Chichester's marriage with Lady Alicia; when the excitement of foreign travel would have lessened, perhaps obliterated,

the impression on Cecilia's mind. But how was this to be accomplished? At present, Mr. Langley suspected nothing of what was passing around him; and if enlightened, might be inclined to treat the whole affair as the chimera of an over-anxious mother; or worse still, affect resentment where no offence had been given—no injury inflicted.

But even should the kind father see matters only in the rational light so desirable, how could Lady Mary reconcile herself either to deprive the country of the valuable services of her husband, or to break up his domestic comfort by leaving him alone at Langley park?

All was, at present, doubt and perplexity in her mind! But the prudence of virtue enabled her to bear up, without allowing Cecilia to suspect the extent of anxiety produced by the unquiet sparkling of her eyes, or the feverish flush upon her cheeks.

“Do let me go out with you, mother!” said the excited girl. “I feel as if the fresh

air would restore me!"—And Lady Mary, apprehending that Cissy was seeking a chance of encountering her cousin, by an airing in the park, remained gravely silent.

"Let us drive to Richmond, or Wimbledon; or if too late to order the carriage, pray take a walk with me in the square. I feel it quite impossible to remain at home, in this close room!"

Lady Mary quietly threw open the window.

"Ah! I see how it is! You do not think me in a state to run the chance of being seen and talked to! But look, mother!—There is not a creature in the square at this hour, except nurses and children. Every one is in the park."

Lady Mary was about to advise a book and solitude; but the perturbation of her daughter seemed really to require the exhaustion of exercise. And who has not felt and cannot estimate that quickening of the pulse, that flurry of the mind, when we feel air and move-

ment have become suddenly necessary to our existence.

But while preparing to comply with her daughter's request for a walk, Lady Mary resolved not to accord the pernicious indulgence of prolonging the conversation concerning her cousin. She began to talk so earnestly of other things, that Cecilia understood, at once, the subject of Lord Chichester was not to be renewed. But with all her power over the mind of her daughter, Lady Mary's assumed gravity did not avail to tranquillize the spirits of her companion. Cecilia's excitement was uncontrollable. She seemed to discern cause for admiration and delight in every object that met her eye. The children were all beautiful, the nurses all careful; even the dusty lilac bushes and shabby hawthorns fringing the road, passed for fair and fragrant.

"The square was such a resource to the inhabitants—so cheerful—so airy—so easy of access!"

And forthwith, the poor girl began to expatiate upon the merits of the Belgrave quarter of the town, its comforts, beauties and conveniences, in terms, which it is to be regretted, Mr. Cubitt could not take down in short hand, to be hereafter engraved upon his monument.

The evil was only increased when Johnny Chichester made his appearance at dinner-time. They sat down, the usual cheerful little dinner-party: Morison Langley with a thousand public matters to discuss with his son and brother-in-law; and the others listening with delight, to every syllable that fell from those venerated lips.

At length came the moment for Johnny to communicate, in his turn, the adventures of the morning. He had a story to tell, almost as good as new, "communicated," (as the Phil. Trans. have it) at Arthur's, by Verde Antico; who, having set up since Lord Grandison's retirement from rakish life, as a moral

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philosopher, or *roué* upon half pay, had recently added to his aliases that of "Sage Green." He had to relate Hook's clever epitaph on a fashionable gambler then recently deceased :—" Here lies England's premier Baron, patiently awaiting the last trump ;" and, at last, after a few more club-sayings and personal doings, he arrived at Chalon's.

" You went with Lord Grandison ?—To make arrangements, then, for a likeness of Lady Alicia ?" inquired Cecilia, turning somewhat pale.

" No, my dear Cis. The pretty faces of charming young ladies are, I confess, attractive things ; but though you may scarcely believe it, elderly gentlemen have faces too, and there are actually people in the world stupid enough to set a value on them. It was my friend Grandison's likeness we went to bespeak."

" A present for his daughter, I am sure !"

" This time, my dear, you have made a

guess that does you credit. Yes ! Lady Alicia has contrived to plague her father into sitting."

"As she is about to leave him," added Miss Langley, with a gradually falling countenance, "it is but natural she should covet so precious a remembrance of home."

"But who told you that she was about to leave him?"

"Grandmamma and my aunt Meliora."

"The Dowager? — Ay, ay ! I might have guessed as much !"

"They mentioned, ten days or a fortnight ago, that Lady Alicia's marriage with Lord Chichester was quite determined upon."

"By whom, pray? — By herself, Goody Crouch and Lady Dearmouth ! — By no one else, I can assure you ! Chichester and Alice? — Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! — I am no patron of what Dr. Johnson calls 'the last argument of a fool;' but on this occasion, Cis, to stimulate your taste for a betting-book,

and entitle you to be seen in the society of Lady Medwyn and Co.—I will venture sixpence that you will see *me* the spouse of Madam Crouch, (let Sir Jacob Appleby look to it,) before you see Lord Grandison's daughter change her name for that of Chichester!—But, perhaps, you are mistaking your man? Perhaps it was *Johnny*, not *Lord* Chichester whom you heard pointed out as the happy bridegroom? For I flatter myself Johnny really *has* some influence over the young heiress's affections; while as to my nephew—”

“ You are certain, then, that there is no truth in the report ?” pursued Cecilia, turning red and pale by turns.

“ As certain as I am that you are peeling that Cr sanne pear with the wrong edge of your knife ! Between ourselves, Madam Cis, (since, like all young ladies of eighteen, you are getting a bit of a gossip in such matters,) my friend Grandison has other projects for his daughter ; and my friend Grandison's

daughter, I suspect, other projects for herself."

Cecilia ventured a single glance towards her mother. But it conveyed such a world of joy and exultation, that Lady Mary felt in duty bound to receive it with the utmost coldness; remarking in a voice sufficiently loud to be heard by her daughter, "that matrimonial projects being so frequently disappointed, it was a sad waste of human time and ingenuity to indulge in building castles in the air, which a breath was at any moment able to destroy."

## CHAPTER IV.

All slander  
Must still be strangled in its birth ; or time  
Will soon conspire to make it strong enough  
To overcome the truth !

SIR W. DAVENANT.

THERE is an epoch of the year when the most domestic of country ladies is apt to fall out with the rural shades ; and strange to tell, it is at the moment when the rural shades are looking their loveliest. In the months of May and June, which afford so much occupation to farmers and gardeners, and set all the old women of all the parishes in England at work upon the ill weeds that grow apace in our

gravel walks, country gentlemen during the field-sport recess, are sure to grow bored ; and the matrons, in whom their souls delight, to fret after the pleasures of the town. Half their country neighbours have emigrated to the great Babylon ; and the morning papers teem with descriptions of the trains and plumes of those who, a little month before, ambled with them in grogram to the village school, to inspect samplers and pass spelling books in review.

Mrs. Evelyn of the Willows, a neat little swamp upon the banks of the Weaver, was precisely in this mood of mind when the scandal intended to cut her to the heart was whetted by the Dowager and her coterie. Every soul was gone to London out of the neighbourhood, with the exception of Sir Thomas and Lady Seldon ; the former of whom was a paralytic little gentleman, who never left his chimney corner ; and the latter, a gen-

tlewoman six feet high, and as active as a power-loom. Poor Mrs. Evelyn, dull as it was to hear her husband grumbling for rain, and to listen to the cawing of rooks as they wheeled over the Willows to seek their more airy tenements at Seldon Park, would have been glad to compound for seeing less of the rooks' landlords, so dispirited did she feel after the kind neighbourly visits of Lady Seldon, which purported to "amuse the poor moping young thing at the Willows with news of the gay metropolis."

Lady Seldon, the colleague and correspondent of Mrs. Crouch, was a harsh, perpendicular woman, every movement of whose wooden figure was so cramped and uneasy, that the beholder expected, on approaching nearer, to hear a creaking as of a vessel labouring against wind and tide. Destitute of a single grace of mind or body, her pleasure consisted in making other people feel as uncomfortable as she looked ; and if success be

a proof of genius, it must be admitted that Lady Seldon possessed extraordinary talents. Her first object was to discover the susceptible point of every new acquaintance, that she might lose no time in applying her caustics ; and very soon after the marriage of the Evelyns and their settling at the Willows, Lady Seldon discovered that Mrs. Evelyn was jealous of her sister, Lady Gransden, as the favourite daughter of her parents ; and that Mr. Evelyn was tenacious concerning Grandison House ; which, though lying within visiting distance of his small seat, had hitherto overlooked its existence. She saw that poor Elizabeth was at once proud and envious of her sister ; and Evelyn, indignant against Lord Grandison, and yet disposed to court his acquaintance.

For two years past, accordingly, she had never put on her condemning cap to proceed to the Willows, without having furnished herself with an account of some charming party given at Grandison House the preceding day,

or week, or year, by way of tantalizing poor Evelyn; or a fashionable journal containing an account of some brilliant entertainment in town, in which there was no mention of Lady Gransden.

“I thought, Ma’am, I understood from you,” she would say, “that your sister was every where; that no one was so much admired; that her beauty and elegance attracted universal attention? Now just look here!—I don’t say that it matters much, Ma’am—but the coincidence is extraordinary. There are accounts in this Morning Post of *three* of the most splendid fêtes of the season, with copious lists of the company, and not a word, not a single syllable of Lady Gransden!—Look among the Viscountesses, Ma’am—no Lady Gransden! Look among the Ladies, Ma’am—no Lady Gransden!—Nothing can be plainer than that your sister was not at any one of *these* parties!”

“It may be so,” would reply Mrs. Evelyn, a nervous little woman, easily dispirited; “but

as you say, it matters very little ; for I can assure you Lady Gransden moves in the best society. Indeed, there is every reason that it should be so."

" Still, my dear Ma'am, facts speak for themselves. Where do you see your sister's name in these very circumstantial lists ? Only point it out to me ! You certainly gave me to understand that Lady Gransden was invited to all the fêtes at D—— House."

" And so, I can assure you, she is. I have not had a letter this fortnight from mamma, through whom I usually hear of Laura's movements ; so that, perhaps, she may be indisposed."

" Ah ! Lady Gransden does not write to you herself, then ? It is only through Mrs. Oakham, Ma'am, that you hear of her ?"

" Laura writes to me every four or five weeks ; but I hear from mamma much oftener."

" Ay, ay ! Mrs. Oakham has not quite so many fashionable engagements on her hands

as, you seem to fancy, fall to the share of the Viscountess; and the letters from Hanbury Park, as we all know—ahem—contain every possible particular concerning your sister. But still I can't fancy that it was indisposition, Ma'am, which kept Lady Gransden away from these parties; because I saw her name only yesterday in the list of visitors to the Olympic Theatre."

"I am sure it is very kind of you to take so much notice of her movements," said Mrs. Evelyn, without intending a sneer. "I will write to my sister to-day; and her answer will probably contain an account of the London gaieties, which I will be sure to take over to Seldon Park, for your amusement, the first time I call."

"I thank you, Ma'am," replied her agreeable visitor. "It may be a proof of stupidity on my part; but I confess I am not so fond of what are called clever letters as many people. I prefer plain sense, and plain truth. Now in

newspapers, Ma'am, facts speak for themselves. It is useless to give a flourishing account of Lord So-and-So's fête, when it has been published in black and white, that one never was there."

"I believe these lists are not always to be depended upon," said Mrs. Evelyn, beginning to feel worried.

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am. If they err, it is by inserting *more* names than the occasion justifies, rather than less. The editors receive from the family, or its confidential servants, the list of people invited, and make no allowance for those who excuse themselves. Now, it is clear, Ma'am, that Lord and Lady Gransden were not even *invited* to D—— House, or their names would be here."

Another time, Lady Seldon would make her appearance with another paper (for the newspapers were often her instruments of torture) to prove to Mrs. Evelyn that her sister had

been presenting some obscure or objectionable person at the drawing-room.

“ I own I am a little surprised, Ma’am, considering all we have heard of Lady Gransden, that she should have courage to undertake a Mrs. Smith. Now, pray look here. Look among the presentations. Those are the advertisements, Ma’am. Dear me, is it possible that any one don’t know where to look for the presentations ! Here, Ma’am—at the head of the list—‘ Mrs. William Smith, by Viscountess Gransden !’ Mrs. William Smith ! now who on earth is Mrs. William Smith ?”

“ Is there not a peer of the name of Smith ?” inquired Mrs. Evelyn, blushing. “ It is probably some relation of *his*.”

“ I beg your pardon, Ma’am ; but in that case, this Mrs. William Smith would probably have been presented by the head of her husband’s family.”

“ I recollect a friend of papa, of that name,

who was always pointed out to me as one of the most valuable members of the House of Commons," said Mrs. Evelyn, feeling rather anxious.

"Oh! *he* has been dead these hundred years! No, Ma'am;—this Mrs. William Smith appears to be some obscure person,—some non-entity—some neighbour, perhaps, at Gransden Hall."

"Very likely. Most people have troublesome country neighbours," replied Mrs. Evelyn, unconscious that she was uttering an epigram. "But I will certainly write to Laura to make the inquiry."

"Oh, pray don't trouble yourself. I dare say it is no new thing to Lady Gransden; and, perhaps, Ma'am, she might be annoyed at having it noticed."

"But she never would do anything at so public a place as the drawing-room, which she did not wish and expect to have noticed," remonstrated Mrs. Evelyn.

“The best thing Lady Gransden can do at the drawing-room, is to wear a handsome dress, and look as pretty as she can. Nay, in my opinion, (and the time was, Ma’am, that I was considered something of a judge of such matters,) in *my* opinion, it is the *only* thing she has to do there. Lady Gransden is not altogether of an age or rank to pretend to make presentations.”

“Not of sufficient rank?” cried Mrs. Evelyn, indignantly. “Surely a Viscountess—”

“My dear Ma’am, there is Viscountess and Viscountess !” cried Lady Seldon, drawing her rigid frame into still more imposing perpendicularity. “Lady Gransden, for instance, is not of noble birth. I rather conceive, Ma’am, that Mrs. Oakham never so much as appeared at court?”

The interrogation was so pointed, that Mrs. Evelyn could not help answering, “I don’t think she ever did.”

“In her own right, therefore, you see,

Ma'am, her Ladyship's pretensions are but small;—and with respect to Lord Gransden—to 'the Viscount,' as *you* always consider him, his peerage is quite an affair of yesterday, you know. There are people still living, Ma'am, who perfectly remember his grandfather, old David Brigson. Now, against a new title of this description, Ma'am, there always exists so strong a prejudice, that were *I* in Lady Gransden's place, I should be particularly cautious about putting myself forward. It provokes remarks, Ma'am, and only tends to expose the nakedness of the land. I should strongly advise Lady Gransden (though, as you so often observe, a Viscountess) to abstain from presenting at the court of her Sovereign, a Mrs. William Smith. Two negatives will never make an affirmative."

"Nor two nobodies a somebody, I suppose you mean," cried Mrs. Evelyn, now worked up into something nearly amounting to a rage. And when Lady Seldon had curtsied off, the

poor little woman actually cried again, though in different wise.

After all this, the delight of the harsh Lady Seldon will readily be conceived, on receiving the letter of Mrs. Crouch. The Viscountess a sinner—the Viscountess engaged in a criminal *liaison*. It was more than she had expected—it was more than she had hoped; nay, it was almost too much; for she was only desirous of an excuse to plague little Mrs. Evelyn, and this was almost her motive to drop her acquaintance. Mrs. Crouch had signified, however, that it might yet be time to save the offender by the interposition of *judicious friends*; (a polite periphrasis, signifying mischief-makers;) and she accordingly ordered her horses with peculiar glee, in the intention of proceeding to the Willows.

It happened, however, that Mrs. Evelyn's husband had found his little wife in tears, after the tall lady's last descent upon his dwelling; and whereas, a short time before, Lady Seldon

had given him mortal offence, by hinting that she always visited the Willows in cork soles, as well as inquiring whether, on account of the largeness of the consumption in the ague season, they did not have their bark from Apothecaries Hall; and above all, as he chose, in a truly marital spirit, to enjoy the monopoly of teasing his wife, he gave orders to his servants, to answer, on her Ladyship's next application for admittance, "Not at home."

Suspecting the truth, perhaps, Lady Seldon remonstrated—pleaded—then raged and stormed; and at length quitted the garden gate, leaving solemn word with the footman, that Mrs. Evelyn's absence from home was most unfortunate, as she had business of the utmost consequence to communicate to her:—her Ladyship, nothing doubting that so mysterious a hint would bring the lady the following day to Seldon Park.

It would probably have done so, but for the obduracy of Mr. Evelyn.

“No, no !” said he. “The old hop-pole, who like Queen Elizabeth, is cankered in mind as in body, has never any thing to relate calculated to afford pleasure to any living soul. Depend upon it, Lizzy, she has some little piece of ill-nature to croak out to you, which she fears will lose its sting by keeping. Don’t go ! If she have any thing to say, let her write. Besides, I want all the horses for the next three days at the farm.”

The last argument, Mrs. Evelyn knew to be final—so she gave up the point ; and for two days after her unsuccessful expedition, Lady Seldon failed not to exclaim : “No signs of the Evelyns yet ? Very well ! Just as they please ! It is some comfort to know, that while they are too listless to drive two miles and a half, the destinies of this charming sister, this vaunted sister, this delightful ‘Viscountess’ are accomplished !”

At length, her suppressed venom brought on a bilious attack ; and unable longer to endure

such a trial of the constitution as a scandal thrown in, she indited an epistle to Mrs. Evelyn, in pale ink upon the bluest note paper, (looking like a bulletin of the plague,) "begging to see her at Seldon Park at her earliest possible convenience, for the communication of family business of the most urgent necessity."

It happened that Mr. Evelyn, as he was making war after breakfast, spade in hand, upon the dandelions on his lawn, espied a groom in the Seldon livery coming to the house; when he exercised his conjugal rights so far as to open the dispatch, and return an answer, making an appointment in Mrs. Evelyn's name for two o'clock; it being the custom of the Evelyns, as of many other people, to time their airings so close upon their servants' dinner hour, as to necessitate the operation suggested by Dame Alison Wilson in *Old Mortality*, of "getting their thrapples causewayed."

But Evelyn had no intention that, on

the present occasion, either coachman or footman should be put in requisition. At half past one, he mounted his solitary nag, as if for one of his usual excursions to the neighbouring post town;—those excursions which country gentlemen who have not much to amuse them at home, attribute to “a little business at the bank,”—or “a paper to sign at the lawyer’s;” but which, in fact, purport only to a greeting in the market-place with other country neighbours, hurrying to the fishmonger’s or ironmonger’s after a turbot or a patent mole-trap, or some other purchase of especial interest requiring the eye of the squire.

Instead, however, of taking his usual course, Evelyn turned off from the high road towards Seldon Park; little suspecting that the grim lady, in full expectation of his wife, was preparing for the conference as surgeons prepare for an operation, by placing salts’ bottles and sal-volatile within reach. He had just time, however, to hear her exclaim (when the ser-

vant preceding him into the morning room, announced "Mr. Evelyn.—" "*Mister* Evelyn? Pray learn, Sir, to speak more correctly, and when you announce a lady, remember her name is Mistress!"

The country footman sniggered at the notion that for once *his* missus was plaguily out; and dawdled in the room arranging the chairs, in order to enjoy his lady's discomfiture while receiving her visitor's explanations that, "Mrs. Evelyn being detained at home by indisposition, he waited upon her Ladyship according to her appointment, for an important communication regarding the interests of his family."

Lady Seldon drew up, and assumed her most repulsive countenance. To do her justice, she looked as hard as a hone.

"There was no immediate haste," she said. "The affair was a delicate one. She preferred waiting the convalescence of Mrs. Evelyn."

But the husband was positive. He knew something of the tender mercies of Seldon

Park, and being aware that it would require a good smart blow of the rod to compel the stream of this flinty Horeb to gush forth, assumed so stern a tone, that Lady Seldon, reflecting upon the insufficiency of her two male champions, Sir Thomas in his Bath chair, and the sniggering footman, who was listening at the door, to eject the resolute intruder, had momentary recourse to one of the salts' bottles prepared for Mrs. Evelyn, by way of invigorating her courage; then burst forth into a recital, which her rage at having it extorted from her, coloured with a far higher pencil than had been intended or anticipated by Mrs. Crouch.

Her object was answered. Poor Evelyn stood confounded. For a moment, indeed, he turned so pale that there seemed every reason for offering to *him* some of the restoratives awaiting his wife.

At length, he recovered his powers of understanding and articulation sufficiently for a few

interrogations; and had the comfort of finding Lady Seldon recede gradually from her first assertion that Lady Gransden had either eloped with Lord Chichester, or was preparing to elope from her husband, into a qualified declaration that the conduct of the Viscountess was calculated to justify such a supposition. Now suppositions, as even Mr. Evelyn of the Willows was aware, take their colouring from the mind in which they are engendered; and he could, therefore, conceive that the gossiping correspondent of a Lady Seldon, might “suppose” one thing, and people of sense and feeling, another.

His heart beat more freely, therefore, as he resumed courage to express a hope to his harsh hostess, that she was not wantonly circulating a scandal calculated to inflict irreparable injury upon the domestic peace of a respectable family; and having ascertained from the tone of her reply, that her information was far from so positive as he had at first

apprehended, he assumed a firmer countenance; and in taking leave, sternly advised her not to proceed further in the dissemination of reports, which he had every reason to believe groundless.

Such, however, was not his secret conviction; and every step of his gloomy homeward ride, tended to confirm his fears that the Viscountess had disgraced herself. He had noticed many weeks before in the newspapers, a paragraph announcing that the Gransdens had dined at Lord Delmaine's with the Medwyns, and that the following week they had actually been entertained at dinner by Mr. and Lady Sophia Ashford; connecting which announcements with his recollection of the remarks formerly made by his sister-in-law upon the laxity of their morals, he accused her of such instability of purpose as was likely to have arisen from the consciousness of error.

Evelyn was not a London man. *His* was no shifting code of ethics. He knew nothing of

the favourite sophism that, "So long as the husband is satisfied, no one has a right to say a word." He did not understand the meaning of "*a liaison pour passer le temps*, in which there is no possible harm." To him, a *divorcée* meant an adulteress ; and the terse abbreviation of crim. con., the type of every thing that is revolting to the laws of God and man, or the delicacy of the female character. He shuddered at the thought of such a stigma resting upon the sister of his wife—upon the consanguineous relative of his children. It is true there were excuses to be made for Evelyn's pragmatism. He was only a country gentleman in a very small way ;—only Mr. Evelyn of the Willows—a place with a garden gate and no housekeeper's room—going twice to church of a Sunday—and not visited by the Right Hon. Earl of Grandison !

Poor fellow !—After marrying into a family of the highest respectability, and bearing with philosophy the preference shewn by the Oak-

hams to their younger daughter and noble son-in-law, it was a hard thing to feel that he and his were to be disgraced by the wickedness of one whose merits had always been thrown in his teeth. John Evelyn had often been twitted by the Oakhams with the lavish indulgences granted by Lord Gransden to his wife. Pretty indulgences!—glorious results! His own relations, (unpretending people, not sufficiently high in the world to overlook moral delinquency,) would never allow him to hear the last of the misdemeanours of his wife's sister!

Evelyn re-entered his garden-gate with chafed feelings, prepared to communicate, with little ceremony, the worst to his wife. But his angry feelings subsided by the time he reached the pretty green lawn at the rear of the house; where sat Mrs. Evelyn, looking so mild and feminine in her white wrapper and morning cap, on a green bench under the trees—with a little fat crowing thing of eight months old in her arms, and a fine boy of two years, making

such mighty efforts with his wheel-barrow, that the mother kept cautioning him against wheeling it into the river which ran at six hundred yards' distance, and was protected by an iron fence !

It was impossible to check with disastrous tidings the affectionate smiles that brightened poor Lizzy's face the moment he made his appearance. The children screamed with delight on his approach ; the mother rose hastily from her seat. He judged it better to cool his wrath by sitting quietly with them in the shade, after his hot dusty ride, ere he proceeded to active measures.

The domestic affections have a singularly purifying influence on the mind ; forming, as it were, a chloride, by the operation of which all the noxious particles afloat are precipitated to the bottom. By the time John Evelyn had been well patted and kissed by his chubby baby, he began to fancy that happiness might still be in store for him, even though the Vis-

countess Gransden should have been whistled down the wind to prey at fortune. Second thoughts came—those children or parents of discretion!—and all his previous resolves melted into a resolution to say not a syllable to his wife of his visit to Lady Seldon, or even to excite her uneasiness concerning her sister; but to set off per mail to Hanbury Park—confide all to his father-in-law—and concert with the Oakhams measures for the salvation of Lady Gransden.

Luckily, Mr. Oakham's seat lay in the road towards London; so that the journey was practicable, without exciting the suspicions of Elizabeth. Every country gentleman has occasionally business in town. Even those to whom the royal court is an unknown puppet-show have business in other courts, in the vicinity of Temple Bar and Westminster Bridge, where the pageant, if also performed by puppets, entails more serious liabilities. The moment John Evelyn hinted that business necessitated his departure for town, Elizabeth

supplied him with a pretext by exclaiming:—  
“Ah! those horrid lawyers! I thought the action with that troublesome canal company had been amicably adjusted?” Unluckily, her very next notion diverged to her sister.

“You will see Laura,” said she. “As you are only to be in town for a few days, you might surely as well take a bed at the Gransdens? You know how often and how kindly they have invited us to stay with them.”

“Perhaps I may.”

“But are you sure of a place in the mail? You had better wait till to-morrow evening, my dearest John, when you may secure one, and so enable me to finish the *manchettes* I have been working for my sister. I should like to send her something by you. And pray remind me, before you go, to give you a lock of little Laura’s hair. My sister wrote to me for one, the other day, to place in the same locket with her brother’s.”

Evelyn felt his sight becoming rather misty, as he listened to all this unsuspecting prattle. He had made up his mind, however; he was a man apt to hold to his resolutions; and his portmanteau accordingly was duly packed, including a little parcel made up in satin paper and tied with white riband, directed (in a handwriting as firm as could be expected from a woman whose husband was going off suddenly to London in the mail,) to the "Viscountess Gransden, Upper Grosvenor Street."

Great was the amazement of Hanbury Park, when the following night saw the son-in-law, and his portmanteau deposited at its lodge-gate! After the first exclamation of wonder at his arrival, and joy at hearing that he had left his wife and children well and happy at the Willows, tea was brought; and before he had made up his mind whether to wait for Mrs. Oakham's retreat, or whether to concede to his mother-in-law a confidence withheld from the

partner of his joys and sorrows, poor Mrs. Oakham began, as usual, to launch into the Gransden chapter.

“I conclude Lizzy hears often from her sister?”—said she. “I suppose she knows of Laura’s being at the three last court balls, and a thousand times more admired than ever? I must do Lady Gransden the justice to say that, amid all her gaieties, she never for a moment loses sight of her family and friends! Last month, the Horrockses went up for a week to town; and there was no end to the kindness shown them by Laura, lending them her opera-box, inviting them to dinner, and getting them tickets for the House of Lords, only because they happen to be neighbours of ours, though on far from a familiar footing.”

“Lord Gransden appears a good-natured, hospitable man,” said Evelyn, drily.

“Lord Gransden?”—cried Mrs. Oakham. “I assure you, everything of that kind proceeds from Laura! Laura has absolute au-

thority in the house ; settles with the steward, draws upon the banker, and does exactly what she pleases !”

“So much the worse,” observed Evelyn, almost morosely ; and his mother-in-law, aware that he was somewhat a stickler for marital prerogative, immediately began quizzing him for a tyrant, and declaring that he was only afraid lest Elizabeth should demand all the privileges enjoyed by her sister.

“God forbid !”—was his involuntary rejoinder. And Mrs. Oakham was beginning to get angry, and her husband anxious, when John Evelyn, unable longer to dissemble, began by gentle degrees to pave the way for his heart-rending communication.

“It is a base and scandalous falsehood !”—cried Mrs. Oakham, starting up with sparkling eyes and swelling bosom, when she had heard him to an end. And the difference between a father’s and a mother’s feelings was perceptible in the fact that *her* confidence in her

daughter secured her disbelief; while Oakham, with a stern brow and compressed lips, murmured threats of vengeance against the offenders should the report prove of good foundation.

There was no rest that night at Hanbury Park!—They sat late—very late—conferring upon what was to be done, and at how early an hour of the morning Mr. Oakham and his son-in-law might set off for town, in order to ascertain on the spot, the extent of the evil; yet scarcely had Evelyn shaken the dust from off his feet in his own room, meditating with the joy of a weary all-night traveller upon the comforts of his pillow, when a knock was heard at his door, and poor Mrs. Oakham in her dressing-gown, came with her pale cheeks and red eyes, to entreat a few minutes' audience. She wanted to talk it all over again with him!—She wanted him to assure her once more that there was hope, and that she need not prepare for the worst. “She came,” she said, “to ask

his real opinion, now that her husband was not present, to be pained by hearing the truth !”

Five minutes afterwards, before Evelyn had said half enough to tranquillize the sobs of the broken-hearted mother, came Oakham, on an exactly similar errand ! He put a cold face upon the matter indeed, trying to disguise his emotions by muttering something about boot-jacks, hot water, and seeing his guest properly attended to. But there was no disguising the fact. It was plain that the poor man had no chance of a wink of sleep till, unknown to his wife, he had renewed the discussion with his son-in-law.

In the morning, the postboy who, according to order, made his appearance at seven, happened to bring with him a parcel, a small packing-case, that had been left at the King’s Arms by the night-coach to be forwarded to Hanbury Park. In the great struggle of such a moment, Mrs. Oakham scarcely deigned to cast an eye upon the address ; but the instant

she saw that it was directed in Laura's handwriting, she cried aloud to her husband and John Evelyn to come into the library and be present at the opening. It *must* contain a letter. The letter might contain comfort for them all!

The pause that ensued was a nervous moment. The two gentlemen stood beside Mrs. Oakham's chair, near the table where she sat watching the butler and his hammer wrenching off the lid; and it was distracting to the poor mother to see how leisurely the man, little suspecting the anxiety of the lookers-on, knocked out nail after nail, and on being hurried by his master, explained how, on the lid, was inscribed "Glass, with care."

At length John Evelyn, whose temper was none of the best, snatched the implement from the man's hand, and attacked the little case with all the recklessness of a house-breaker. His zeal was rewarded. The first thing that greeted their eyes was a letter in Lord Grans-

den's hand-writing, directed to Mrs. Oakham. To tear it open was the work of a moment ; but after several attempts, she found that to read it was impossible. Her head swam, her eyes refused their office. Doubtless it came to announce the afflicting tidings of her daughter's infamy—her daughter's disappearance.

“Read it aloud !” faltered the trembling woman, with blanched and quivering lips, placing it in the hand of Evelyn. But even *he* was obliged to clear his voice twice, ere he could make himself audible. The letter, which was dated from Grosvenor Street, two days before, ran as follows :—

“ My dearest Mrs. Oakham,

I am sure I can offer you no token of my affection half so acceptable as the accompanying portrait of one who formerly constituted the blessing of your fireside, as she now does of my own. Accept dear Laura's likeness, as a pledge of gratitude and regard

from him who deprived you of the original. People in general consider it one of Chalon's very best sketches. I am not quite satisfied with the eyes; but husbands, you know, are not easy to be pleased. With kind regards to Oakham, to which Laura adds her affectionate love,

I am, my dear Mrs. Oakham, (for partner and self, as the bankers say,)

Yours most affectionately,

GRANSDEN."

Those who are old enough to recall to mind the shriek uttered by Miss O'Neill in the part of Mrs. Beverley, when she sees Lewson alive, and knows that her husband is guiltless of the murder laid to his charge, may conceive the expression of Mrs. Oakham's face, ere she covered it with her hands, and sank upon her knees to render thanks to God for the innocence of her child. Her husband, too, wept unrestrainedly. The tenderness of both

towards the absent Laura was such as to accept, unquestioning, anything tending to her exculpation.

But this could not last. Painful as it was to impose a check upon their joy, Evelyn felt it his duty to remind them that the letter was two days old; and that even were it of later date, Lord Gransden's blindness was no guarantee for the innocence of their daughter. It had been observed by Lady Seldon, in aggravation of her offence, that Lord Gransden was still the dupe of his wife—still ignorant of her irregularities. Such might be the origin of his gift and letter; in which case, it doubly behoved those to whom her well-doing was of such import, to see her, and by menaces or counsels, draw her back from the precipice on whose brink she was standing.

After some consideration, Mr. Oakham thought so too; and the post-horses being still in the stable yard, were ordered round. But Mrs. Oakham now insisted upon bearing

them company. She had never even desired the journey, so long as there was a supposition that it was a guilty daughter she should have to fold in her arms. The dread of beholding her Laura, her pride, her darling, lost and degraded, and perhaps glorying in her degradation, had rendered the journey impossible. But she now felt it her duty, as an act of reparation towards one whom she was doubly convinced had been unjustly aspersed, to hasten to her presence, and, clasping her to her heart, pour forth a mother's tears of tenderness and joy.

But again, John Evelyn's discretion took the lead.

“What motive would you allege for this sudden journey?”—said he. “The Gransdens are aware that you never had the smallest intention to visit London this season. Your sudden arrival might excite surmises in Lord Gransden's mind.”

Inconveniences to arise from both master

and mistress leaving home at a moment's notice, came in support of these arguments ; and ultimately Mrs. Oakham was content to stand with streaming eyes under the portico, watching the steady trot at which the travelling carriage passed from the park into the high road towards London.

## CHAPTER V.

Here, in all haste, through several ways men run,  
Some to undo, and some to be undone ;  
While wealth and luxury, like war and peace,  
Are each the other's ruin and increase,  
As rivers lost in seas, some secret vein  
Thence reconveys, there to be lost again.

SIR JOHN DENHAM.

LONDON was now at its maddest. The sun which, in the merry month of May, is visible even to the naked eye in London, shone out brightly upon legions of well-dressed people and well-dressed horses, with thousands of brilliant carriages, in whose panels you might see your faces—unless better pleased to look at the faces within.

All the world was laughing, chatting, dancing, singing, while the Dowager coterie was evil-speaking, lying, and slandering. The two Houses were scolding at each other, like superannuated old women squabbling about their berths in the workhouse. The fine arts were brushing up their palettes for Academy dinners; the Jockey Club and the Treasury balancing their books; the Bank and Opera issuing their notes, till every bench, and more especially the Queen's, was full to overflowing.

The play grew warm at Crockford's; the fun deadly lively at the Steaks. *Non nobis domine* was sung seventeen times a day at different public dinners—pine-apples were at a premium—Almacks was waltzing and flirting itself giddy—all the booths and shows of the great fair of fashion, in short, were blazing in their fullest effulgence.

The coteries were chattering away, like the parrot-house at the Zoologicals, till reasonable beings could not hear themselves speak for the

screaming of cockatoos and twittering of love-birds. And all the time, the newspapers went on gravely announcing, day after day, *whose* dinners were eaten by *whom*, what balls were iced by Gunter and fiddled to by Tolbecque; who had princesses to curtsy to—who ambassadors—and who only the plebeian throng of mere nobility.

It inspires no great respect for the benevolence of human nature, to reflect how many of this elect parcel of its body composite, derived their chief gratification from mortifying and tormenting each other. Considering the joyousness of the scene, and the pains taken to enhance its pleasures, it is difficult to conceive why discontent, envy, hatred, and malice should not give themselves a holiday, and forbear for a time the impish sport of cutting and maiming—that is, cutting acquaintances and maiming reputations. Perhaps, however, it were as easy for the toad to cast its venomous skin, or the rattle-snake its venomous fangs, as for scandal

to forego its spite, or exclusivism its impertinence ; and it is little to be wondered at that, when the Duchess of Woolwich and her daughters, Mrs. Maddington, the Ashfords, Medwyns, and about a dozen others of their set, met together with the conviction of being superior to the rest of the world, because their play was higher and their conversation lower, they should delight in comparing notes, like the flash mob of an inferior grade, as to how many facers they had planted—how many stabs inflicted in the dark—how many insolences thrown in the face of “the beak”—how many kicks launched out at intruders presuming to approach too near their places of rendez-vous.

These people—people of fashion, indeed, but as regards the higher walks of human nature, mere populace—were hardened by prosperity, as clay is hardened into stone by the sunshine. They were without pity, without tenderness ; and whenever a victim was flung to them by the care of the purveyors of scandal, such as

the Dowager and her clique, you might as well expect *Pours Martin* and his shaggy comrades, to spare some tender infant precipitated into the bear-pit, as for the select to show mercy to a reputation placed at their disposal.

Ruthless as the fates, they sat spinning their subtle threads in the Duchess of Woolwich's exquisite boudoir; unsoftened by the refinements of life crowded around them—unelevated by a single noble sentiment—unawed by a single moral responsibility. Their children, mere playthings, seemed born to be first tawdry dolls; next, well-trained automatons; and at length, dashing dreadnoughts like themselves. But how would it have been possible for *them* to undertake the hard labour of education? Had they not their flirtations to keep up—their lists to make—their mischiefs to project—their scandals to simmer over a slow fire—

Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble—

toil to them, and trouble to the rest of the world?

Lady Gransden's unpopularity in this unfemininely feminine senate, has been already admitted. They, the emitters of more fiery showers of ill-nature than Vesuvius of cinders, could not forgive her the animadversions she had never uttered. But a new cause of offence rendered her more obnoxious than ever. Their designs upon Lord Gransden as a party-man, were supposed to have been frustrated by her intervention. They were convinced that the good natured thoughtless young man would have been easily coaxed into fancying himself a Tory, but for the steadiness of his wife in entreating him not to commit himself by a step at all times entailing so much odium as a change of politics, without consulting a friend to whom he was so much indebted as his guardian, General Maxwell;—a friend, by whose prudent management his estates had been brought round during his minority, and a

mother's spoiled whelp converted into a well-conditioned young man.

Lady Gransden was no politician. Her father was a staunch Whig, residing in a stiff Tory neighbourhood; and her girlhood had, consequently, been wearied to death with political discussions in which her sympathies naturally enlisted themselves on the side of her parents. Since her marriage, her associates had been chiefly of liberal politics. Her country neighbours the Delmaines, her friends the Veres, all professed the same political views as her father; and her husband's two young friends, Sir Henry Windsor and Lord Chichester, were even extreme in the liberality of their opinions. She was ill-inclined, therefore to see her husband secede from the cause so respectable in her eyes; more especially upon the mere persuasion of a knot of fashionable women, who, if the truth must be told, employed more blandishment towards the conversion than was altogether satisfactory to a loving

wife. She really saw no reason why, evening after evening, Mrs. Maddington should draw Gransden off into the furthest possible corner, and dazzle his eyes with the fairness of her skin and unfairness of her arguments, while endeavouring to prove that the world could not go round in safety, unless a portion of its more obstinate inhabitants agreed to stand stock still as a dead weight upon its movements. It was possible that the rattling beauty might choose, like the rattle-snake, to fascinate by the power of her eyes; but the Viscountess was determined that the charm should not prove fatal.

All the generous feelings of her young heart were with a party professing the advocacy of the interests of humanity, and promising the liberation of the enslaved. But she knew that her mere assertion of the soundness of their intentions would not suffice to parry the insidious arguments by which Mrs. Maddington and the Duchess, her fugleman, had almost succeeded in persuading him that it was the inten-

tion of the Whigs, as soon as they had thrown off their dominos and avowed themselves Radicals in disguise, to assign Gransden Park to Robert Owen and Co., for the erection of a New Harmony. She saw that she must obtain information before she could hope to afford enlightenment. She knew that Gransden, affectionately attached to her as he was, would imbibe twice as readily from her lips as from those of another, the influences likely to actuate his conduct. The only difficulty lay in selecting her own preceptor. She had more respect for Sir Henry Windsor's intentions than for his judgment; and even as regarded Lord Grandison, his politics were those of an optimist rather than of either Conservative or Whig; or rather, so wild were his sallies on all matters regarding politics or religion, that she felt he was a man to whom she would as little entrust her soul's salvation, as the safe keeping of her husband's proxy.

There was one other man on terms of ex-

treme intimacy at her house, both as Lord Gransden's early friend and the only son of their nearest country neighbour; and Lord Chichester, being not only an intelligent scholar, but a politician reared almost on the knees of Morison Langley, to whose skirts he affected to attach himself in the House, she turned to him with confidence, as the Mentor most available. Morison Langley was the political Pope of Hanbury Park. So long as she could remember, she had heard his speeches read, and his health toasted by her father; and where better could she seek instruction than from the proselyte of his adoption?

Such was the immediate cause of their intimacy. Both at Gransden and in town, Lord Chichester had always been a most acceptable guest. But the Viscount's general invitation of "remember there is a knife and fork for you at my table, whenever you have nothing better to do," was now constantly converted into more positive engagements by Laura's

desire for his society. Whenever he came, she tried to direct the conversation towards politics ; which, to own the truth, afforded a topic less agreeable to Lord Gransden than others of lighter moment; and she was delighted to perceive that her efforts and the clear, easy, unaffected expositions of her guest, had the effect of gradually strengthening the wavering faith of her husband.

Six weeks after Lady Gransden's discovery of the object of Lady Medwyn's and Mrs. Maddington's advances, the Viscountess saw that the Tories had no more chance with her husband than with herself; and it was a comfort to her that the victory had been achieved without necessitating any assumption on her own part of that odious character—the female politician.

There was one person, indeed, who had taken some share in the toil without receiving all the credit due to his exertions. Augustus Langley had been, from the beginning of the

season, assiduous in his court to Lady Gransden; who had accepted his acquaintance as the uninteresting son of the interesting member for ——shire, without experiencing that leaning in his favour which she felt towards the two bosom friends of her husband. She was glad to see him in her opera-box, except when a fit of jealousy excited him to a sparring match with his more favoured cousin; or to take his arm in a ball-room, when Lord Gransden or his friends did not happen to be at hand to escort her to her carriage. But she had never invited him to Grosvenor Street, till the attack made by the Tory coterie upon her husband decided her to fill her house with persons of a decidedly political turn; when being aware that her light-headed, light-hearted Lord was less likely to listen to men of whose age and reputation he stood in awe, than to friends of his own years who wielded the tilting lance of debate rather than the tomahawk, she extended her graciousness to Augustus till he

was nearly as much in Grosvenor Street as his cousin.

In the sequel, Augustus Langley did more towards rendering the Viscount stedfast in his political faith, than all the Bolingbrokisms and Ciceronian quotations of the classical Chichester; *his* arguments being borrowed from the sober practical views of his father, were above all others calculated to bring conviction to a wavering mind. Yet the ungrateful Laura saw only the praise of being a gentlemanly, intelligent young man, to bestow upon one who had neither fagged for her husband at Eton, nor been summoned before the Dean with him at Oxford, when Lord Grandison, very early in his acquaintance with her, launched out into a panegyric upon Augustus Langley, as the most delightful young man of his acquaintance.

The Earl intended, by this vehement expression of admiration, to make the frequent chaperon of his daughter understand how per-

fectly he approved Lady Alicia's intimacy with the son of Morison Langley, and how pleased he was to see them dancing or chatting together. But the Viscountess, unable at present to enter into parental projects, saw in Lord Grandison's tirade an insinuation against her husband's friend, Lord Chichester, towards whom she considered him unaccountably ungracious ; and noticed the attack of the Earl, only by redoubling her attentions to the elder cousin.

She did not, of course, discourage Lady Alicia de Wendover's civilities to Augustus Langley ; on the contrary, she did all in her power to secure to her young friend the partner to whom her father avowed himself so partial. But she chose to repair Lord Grandison's injustice towards poor Chichester, by insisting upon his making one in all their parties ; and dedicating to Lord Gransden all the time he could spare from his public duties and private engagements. He had already

done so much towards directing his friend's thoughts to graver objects than barouche-driving and pigeon-shooting, that while thanking her stars for Lord Gransden's escape from the paralyzing clutch of the Tories, she did not forget also to evince her gratitude to Lord Chichester.

Such were the motives which were now re-inciting against her the enmity of the Duchess of Woolwich's set; and rendering them almost as vindictive in their notice of proceedings, as the venomous Dowager; and as there exists a magnetic relation between all scandal-mongers, a species of *clairvoyance* soon attracted the parties into confederacy.

Lady Medwyn, recalling to mind that it was from Mrs. Crouch she had originally derived the information concerning the letter said to be written from Melton by the young Viscountess, set off accordingly to Harvey Street in pursuit of more useful knowledge. For the first time, during their acquaintance, it was

satisfactory to her that the Admiral's widow was announced to be "at home," by a little fubsy page in a bright green livery, looking wonderfully like a Brussels' sprout; but, as every sweet must have its sour, she had the mortification to find that, though at home, she was not alone. Close beside her work-table, sat little Sir Jacob Appleby, who, had he been purchased of Baldock, instead of purloined from the Athenæum club, would have looked much better *upon* it; so closely, in all but his brittleness, did he resemble one of the China monsters in which fanciful ladies take delight. But there was nothing casual about Sir Jacob; who had rattled about the world in the train of Mrs. Crouch, throughout the eight years of her widowhood, without being either the worse or the better for his perambulations.

As she entered the room, the words "Hush! not a word before Lady Medwyn!"—addressed in an audible whisper by the widow to her monster, might have, perhaps, affronted her

back again to her carriage, but for the urgency of her errand. But scarcely was she seated, when Sir Jacob, as if replying to the foregoing remark, observed: "You are much to blame, my dear Madam, not to confide the matter to Lady Medwyn, who, from her peculiar facilities, will be able to let you into the whole secret."

Nothing is so disagreeable as to be the third person between two who seem to share between them some excellent joke or mystery; more particularly when, as in the present case, the third person is bent upon engrossing the conversation. Lady Medwyn, conceiving that the surest way of getting rid of the bubble was by making it burst, accordingly affected the most eager interest concerning the secret which she possessed such "extraordinary facilities" for expounding.

"I really hardly know what to say," observed Mrs. Crouch, glancing at Sir Jacob.

"Her Ladyship will, I am sure, understand

that the communication is confidential," replied the little monster, in the same tone.

"Still, poor dear Lady Delmaine was so *very* particular, if you remember, in exacting my promise to be discreet?"

"But you did *not* promise!" interrupted the mannikin. "I can attest, my dear Madam, that you made no definite promise."

"Besides, poor Lady Gransden might be so cruelly compromised were the rumour to escape!" argued the widow.

And at this announcement, Lady Medwyn, who had allowed the playful old couple to fool each other to the top of their bent without molestation, began in earnest to be deeply interested in the conversation; and to descend to promises of irreproachable discretion.

"Mrs. Crouch might rely upon it, that in any matter in which Lady Gransden was concerned, she would be secret as the grave."

"The fact is," replied the widow, still affecting hesitation, and still looking significantly

at Sir Jacob ; “ the affair to which my friend has been so rash as to allude in your presence, is one of the *very utmost* delicacy ;—one involving, not only the character of a charming though not very prudent young woman, but the destinies of a gallant and persecuted nation !”

Lady Medwyn was now thoroughly puzzled. She had known Mrs. Crouch long enough to be aware that she was a lady apt to monster her nothings, from Sir Jacob upwards ; yet still, this tremendous preamble seemed to threaten that the mountain would, on the present occasion, really bring forth an elephant instead of a mouse. There was clearly but one mode of bringing her hostess to the point.

“ I see how it is,” said she rising abruptly ; “ and as I would not for worlds interrupt a confidential conversation, pray give me leave to ring for my carriage. I will call upon you another time. Perhaps, as I am much in the

habit of meeting Lady Gransden in the world, it may be as well for me to keep out of the way of learning anything to her disadvantage."

Her object was instantly answered. "Oh! dear no!—She must positively sit down again.—She must not run away with erroneous impressions.—She must not imagine things worse than they really were. Sir Jacob was very wrong to have made so much mystery. It really was no concern of any of *theirs* that there should be a very handsome young man, an emissary of Don Carlos, surreptitiously received at the Foreign Office, and concealed in the house of Lord Gransden!"

"A handsome young man? An emissary of Don Carlos?" The blow told both ways. Lady Medwyn felt it as a woman and as a Tory. *Not* to have been in the secrets of the Carlists, and to *be* in the secret of Lady Gransden! "Thus she was doubly arm'd" both against the treacherous Whig ministry

and the prudish wife of Lord Gransden ! The worst of it was, that no reliance could be placed upon the word of her informants.

“ Depend upon it, this is mere fabrication !” cried she. “ Would any woman—would any minister—so commit themselves ? Be assured it will turn out a thing devised by the enemy ; a trap to engage some notable Whig to get up in parliament and expose himself by demanding explanation.”

“ No such thing, I assure you !” cried Mrs. Crouch, herself falling into a trap. “ The Dowager Lady Delmaine saw, with her own eyes this Don Sanchez Gaspardo de Torres Vedras, coming nefariously out of the house of Lord Gransden.”

“ Saw with her own spectacles, I conclude you mean !” sneered Lady Medwyn. “ Lady Delmaine’s eyes are about as much to be depended upon as her son’s ears !”

“ Perhaps so ; but her Ladyship’s ears and John Chichester’s eyes are unimpeachable ;

and it was from her son, who witnessed the young gentleman's mysterious exit, as well as the Dowager, that she heard the whole account of his mission."

"This is really a very extraordinary story!" cried Lady Medwyn. "Mr. Chichester passes in the world for a man to be depended upon."

"I have known him these twenty years, and can attest that he is honour itself!" cried the valorous little Sir Jacob. "Besides, you know, he has such peculiar facilities for knowing the truth of the matter!—Consider the intimacy of his nephew, Lord Chichester, at the house!—Lord Chichester is Lady Gransden's shadow, not to say substance. Frequenting Lady Delmaine's house as I do, it is impossible for me not to be an eye-witness of things—which—" he paused.

"Of things *which*—?" persisted Lady Medwyn.

"Of things which it may not be altogether prudent to relate."

“ I assure you, it is a very happy thing for Lady Gransden that her opposite neighbour happens to be a woman of the age of the Dowager,” added Mrs. Crouch, looking highly mysterious.

“ I am quite sure that so irregular a person as Lady Gransden is a very unpleasant opposite neighbour for poor Lady Delmaine !” cried Sir Jacob. “ Certainly, Lady Meliora Chichester is not a child. But delicacy has no age ; and I confess I was sorry for her one day, when I saw her driven from the window by the hoyden proceedings of the Viscountess, who was actually running romping round the drawing-room, though aware that all the French windows were wide open, with a man’s hat upon her head ; yes, Lady Medwyn !—a man’s hat upon her head, and pursued from corner to corner—by—”

“ By Lord Chichester ?” cried Lady Medwyn.

“No, Madam—by Lord Gransden!—whose hat, I suspect, she must have snatched away.”

“I wish she may have been guilty of nothing worse!” said Lady Medwyn, provoked to have been tempted into listening to Sir Jacob’s puerilities, “for appearances are sadly against her. But, pray, how are we to reconcile the Spanish gallant you talk of with her *liaison* with Lord Chichester, which is matter of public notoriety?”

“There is no accounting for a lady’s caprices!” observed Sir Jacob, with a facetious smile, that rendered his monstrosity more revolting than usual.

“Who knows but she may desire to pique him by a little jealousy?” added the widow. “People say he has been making up to the heiress, Lady Alicia de Wendover.”

“Indeed?—I vow I should not be surprised!”—cried Lady Medwyn, recalling to mind how she had been tormented by Lady

Delmaine and Lady Charlotte Chichester to meet Lord Grandison and his daughter at dinner in Belgrave Square. "Ay, ay! I see through it now, as clearly as possible. She wanted to punish her friend's infidelity, and this foreigner—this mysterious emissary, presented himself most *à propos*. The only thing I do not exactly understand is the part taken by Lord Gransden in the affair."

"Is one ever able to understand the part taken by husbands in such affairs?" observed Sir Jacob. "Besides, he may be actually ignorant of the name and nature of the guest he is entertaining under his roof. This Don Sanchez Gaspardo di Torres Vedras may have brought him false credentials, may have imposed upon him under a feigned name and character."

"It would really be charity to enlighten him!" observed Lady Medwyn, half interrogatively.

“Certainly, if it were not for the solemn nature of my agreement to secresy,” added Mrs. Crouch.

“Supposing we consult the Dowager, and ask her sanction?” resumed Lady Medwyn.

“If you choose; but I forewarn you that so great is Lord Gransden’s detestation of her name, that it would suffice for the intelligence to come from 34, Upper Grosvenor Street, to be utterly discredited.”

“You conceive, perhaps, that he would place greater reliance upon your own information?”

“No, I am too often with poor dear old Lady Delmaine for him to entertain much opinion of me.”

“And *I* cannot move in the matter for fear of committing Lord Medwyn’s party with the Carlists,” observed Lady Medwyn, growing suddenly cautious. “There is, in fact, but one person who could undertake the office

with propriety. Let Sir Jacob Appleby wait upon Lord Gransden, and delicately break the matter to him."

"Me?—I am exceedingly obliged to you!" cried the little man, growing as red as a tomato. "I have not the slightest doubt that any man proceeding to the Viscount on such an errand, would be kicked down stairs!"

"Or catawampously chawed up!" said Lady Medwyn, full of contempt for his cowardice.

"I might suggest," observed Mrs. Crouch, looking mysteriously towards the folding-doors, lest the Brussels' sprout should be listening, and lowering her voice to an ominous whisper, "though it is a means to which no honourable mind could have recourse, except in a case of the greatest emergency; supposing—I only say supposing—we were to avoid all difficulty and all danger, by conveying the intelligence to Lord Gransden in a letter?"

"An anonymous letter?"—cried Lady Medwyn. And as it was not easy to determine

whether her tone were that of indignation or admiration, Mrs. Crouch attempted to hedge out by replying :

“ Why — a — not *exactly* an anonymous letter.”

“ A letter in your own name, then ?”

“ My dear Lady Medwyn !—to what would not such a step expose me !—*me*, an unprotected widow !”

“ In ours, perhaps ?”

“ No—I mean a letter—a—without any signature at all.”

“ You mean exactly what I said—an anonymous letter. Well, I see no objection. But as the Gransdens know my hand, it will be impossible for *me*, you know, to write it.”

“ And they know mine,” added Mrs. Crouch ; “ so that *my* assistance is equally out of the question.”

“ It would be rather an unpleasant task for *me*,” faltered Sir Jacob, perceiving that it was about to be thrown upon his shoulders.

“Why, my dear Sir Jacob, you are actually turning pale. Surely you are not alarmed for the consequences of Lord Gransden’s resentment?” cried Lady Medwyn, turning upon the little man the full lustre of her audacious eyes.

The widow added a still more piquant appeal to the valour of her chevalier; whereupon Sir Jacob, who like all diminutive men, was exceedingly susceptible on the score of courage, made proof of his bravery by undertaking one of the most sneaking actions in the catalogue of social crime.

A long discussion ensued upon the wording of the letter. None of the parties chose to avow the smallest knowledge of, or experience in such compositions. As vulgar orators commence their harangues with, “Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking,” every member of the synod in Harley Street seemed anxious to begin with “Unaccustomed as I am to anonymous letter-writing.”

“I am sure I can’t conceive how such things are expressed,” cried Mrs. Crouch, shrugging her shoulders.

“I recollect once receiving one which evidently came from an experienced hand,” said Lady Medwyn, “beginning, ‘Lady Medwyn is apprised by a friend’—so-and-so.”

“Well, why shouldn’t we address Lord Gransden in the same style? I am sure we *are* his friends!”

“And *hers*, too, poor woman, if she would only think so. I can hardly conceive a more friendly act than to snatch from perdition a poor unsuspecting young creature of that age, who little imagines what years of wretchedness she is on the eve of entailing upon herself and others. Well, Sir Jacob, will the pen do?”

“Excellently, I dare say—I—I have not yet tried it,” stammered the agitated little man.

“Why, my dear Sir, surely you are not going to be all day inditing half a dozen lines,”

cried Lady Medwyn. "I am to be with Lady Sophia Ashford by four."

"I—I was thinking," hesitated Sir Jacob, "that by employing this paper, which is of a somewhat peculiar make, we might, perhaps, afford a clue to trace this—this delicate little affair—to my friend Mrs. Crouch."

"True, very true!" cried the widow. "I had not thought of it. The fact is, that being so utterly inexperienced in such matters. But I will send my page instantly to the nearest stationer's."

"Un—under—these circumstances," faltered Sir Jacob, who had only suggested the difficulty in order to procure delay, "supposing we—were—to defer the letter till another day?"

"Another day!" cried Lady Medwyn. "Why this man—this Don Sanchez what's his name—may have fled the country within the next twenty-four hours!"

"In which case, Lady Gransden would be

safe without our interference," observed the victim, in a low voice.

"My own maid, probably, keeps common writing-paper for ordinary purposes," suggested Mrs. Crouch. And having hurried to her dressing-room, she returned as quickly with half a quire of ill-complexioned Bath post, deposited there for her correspondence with her tradespeople. Sir Jacob had now no excuse for further delay; so, after biting his lips, clearing his voice, shifting his feet under the table, and nervously lifting the flaps of his coat as if afraid that he was sitting on hot irons, the little gentleman, by slow degrees and with many tremulous pauses, completed the following lines:

"Lord Gransden is apprized by a friend, that an individual is harboured in his house whose presence there, known to many, may prove equally injurious to his honour, and to

the political interests of his country ; to wit, one Don Sanchez Gaspardo di Torres Vedras, emissary from the camp of Don Carlos."

In a faint inarticulate voice, he next proceeded to read what he had written.

"In my opinion, the allusion to Lady Gransden is not sufficiently explicit," observed Lady Medwyn, authoritatively.

"Supposing, my dear Sir Jacob," observed Mrs. Crouch, "that you were to add, 'Lady Gransden is, perhaps, able to afford further explanation.'"

"Would not that be a—*little*—particular?" hesitated Sir Jacob.

"Nonsense! Such a letter, to mean anything, *must* be particular," cried Lady Medwyn.

"There, sit down again, like a good soul, and add what I have dictated," said Mrs. Crouch, in so dictatorial a tone and attitude, that down dropped the little man into his seat; from which he did not venture to emerge till the

letter was finished, left unsigned, but sealed, and delivered to Lady Medwyn, who undertook the office of depositing it in the two-penny post.

“When shall we three meet again?”—demanded her Ladyship, in a jocular tone, as she rose to proceed to the execution of her commission. “What, if we make an appointment to be here on Friday, at the same hour, to communicate anything further that may have come to our knowledge respecting this mysterious affair?”

“With all my heart,” cried Mrs. Crouch, and Sir Jacob was on the point of responding, “With all my soul!” but, conscious of wanting courage to call his soul his own, he contented himself with a profound and silent bow.

“Before we part, however,” said Lady Medwyn, returning from the door, “it may not be amiss to bind ourselves mutually by a compact, that, come what may, nothing shall induce any one of us, singly or severally, to

disclose a syllable of what has passed this morning in this room."

"We promise!—we promise!"—cried Mrs. Crouch and Sir Jacob, in a tone and attitude correspondent with her own; a ceremony which served to close the scene with the same solemn pomp that attends the oath-scene of the three champions of liberty, in the drama of William Tell.

## CHAPTER VI.

Her eye did seem to labour with a tear  
That suddenly took birth, but, overweigh'd  
With its own swelling, dropp'd upon her bosom,  
Which by reflection of the light appear'd  
As nature meant her grief for ornament.  
After, her looks grew cheerful, and I saw  
A smile shoot graceful upward from her eyes  
As if they gain'd a victory o'er care ;  
And with it many beams twisted themselves,  
Upon whose golden thread the angels walk  
To and from heaven.

SHIRLEY.

“ I REALLY wish Mrs. Bennet, Ma'am, you would have the goodness to speak a little word to my Lord concerning Lady Alicia,” said Wallis, intruding one night into the school-

room after Lady Helen and Lady Mary were in bed, and the governess quietly seated for the private enjoyment of what governesses delight in—a writing-desk covered with inky green baize, and stuffed full of mysterious hieroglyphical packets and papers, containing orts and ends of learning for future adjustment in her common-place book; besides a shabby well-worn pocket-book, four-and-twenty years of age, containing divers Bank of England notes, a lock of coarse hair, and the extracted column of an old newspaper, setting forth the loss of the Dorset East Indiaman, off the back of the Isle of Wight, in which good ship had perished David Bennet, her defunct spouse, first mate of the same.

“I’m very sorry to intrude, Ma’am,” resumed Wallis, taking the seat into which she was motioned by Mrs. Bennet, “particular as I know this is your only hour for reckeryhation. But I’m pusuaded that where the interests of my young lady are concerned—”

“Pray make no apologies,” said Mrs. Bennet, closing up at once the well-stuffed desk, whose hinges were decidedly out of joint, and prepared to give immediate attention to anything regarding her beloved pupil. “Speak, Wallis. What is the matter with Lady Alicia?”

“Only, Ma’am, that unless you are good enough to bestir yourself by calling my Lord’s attention, my young lady will certainly be racked into a galloping consumption, or a hatrophy, or something of that dreadful description.”

“Indeed? have you any—”

“I only just appeal to your good sense Ma’am,” interrupted the waiting-maid. “My late lady was of a very delicate constitution, as was proved by her early death after a confinement, which needn’t by no means have destroyed a woman in ordinary health. I remember the doctors agreeing on that pint, as well as if it was yesterday. Now, Ma’am, my Lady Alicia, who certainly takes after her ma’,

as like as two drops of water, (as I'm sure you, who remember Lady Grandison, will allow,) is exactly of the same make and constitution. And yet my Lord suffers that girl, who is only a few months turned of seventeen, to go raking herself to death, night after night, six days in the week, as if she was as strong as a horse or a housemaid."

"Certainly, Lady Alicia does seem to keep sadly late hours," observed the governess, in a voice of sympathy.

"*Late*, Ma'am?—I declare to you, that except of Sunday mornings after the opera, and Sunday nights after the evenings at home, I hav'n't caught sight of my blessed bed any night these two months before four in the morning—nay, sometimes five; for even when Lady Alicia *does* come home half an hour earlier than usual, I make it my duty to dawdle about in the dressing-room till I find that she's comfortable asleep, poor dear."

"I'm afraid such hours are a sad trial, even

to *you*, Wallis," said Mrs. Bennet, good-naturedly.

"Now, pray, Ma'am, don't go to suppose that it is for myself I am speaking," cried Wallis. "Though, to be sure, in my late lady's time (who, after her marriage, was a complete stay-at-home) things was very different, and it wasn't four times in the season I was kept up after midnight. Hours, everywhere, was earlier then, Ma'am, with high and low; yet, God knows, I wouldn't grudge my night's rest the whole three hundred and sixty-five nights of the year, if they could be of any real service to the family—in sickness or the like. I'm sure, Mrs. Bennet, you will do me the justice to remember, Ma'am, that, in that one-and-thirty day fever of Lady Mary's, last year—"

"Certainly, certainly," replied the governess, who had no mind to go, for the fiftieth time, into the details of the indisposition in question.

"But you'll allow, Ma'am, that 'tis quite a different matter to be kept at my age out of

my warm bed after my day's work, only to see my poor dear young lady come home by daylight, looking pale as a ghost, and hagged as a dowager, scarcely able to pant up stairs; throwing herself into the nearest chair, with 'Oh, Wallis!—a glass of water!' or some exclamation of the kind."

"And is my poor dear Alicia really exhausted to this degree?" exclaimed the governess in an anxious tone, drawing her chair closer to that of the waiting-maid. "What madness—what folly, on the part of Lord Grandison!"

"Bless your heart, Ma'am, gentlemen goes through the world and sees nothing!"—exclaimed Wallis. "Their brains is always a-running upon the state of the nation, or that sort of rubbish; and much the nation's the better for it! But if *you* was once to pint out, Ma'am, that really Lady Alicia is falling into a most alarming condition; that she goes to bed every night with a head-ache, and gets up in a fever—"

"But how can she do otherwise than go to

bed with a head-ache," interrupted Mrs. Bennet, "after being exposed from eleven o'clock till four in the morning, to the rattle of an orchestra, containing kettle-drums and *cornets à piston*!—nay, on opera or concert nights, from eight—positively eight hours! And then, after suffering all night from the head-ache, what more natural than that she should rise in a high fever in the morning?"

"Ah! poor dear young lady! she's not long for this world, nor I neither, if my Lord allows her to go on much longer at this rate!" sighed poor Wallis. "Why, Ma'am, if you'll believe me, she's falling away so terribly that I've been forced to take in her riding-habit and morning-pelisses two inches round the waist; (the ball-dresses, luckily, are too quickly done with to make more work for me!) and when I spoke of it to Mrs. Busk, the mantuamaker, she tells me 'so much the better; *that* was what the ladies called fining down!' Now it's what *I* call *pinning* down."

"It certainly cannot be right," resumed

Mrs. Bennet. "And pray, Wallis, do you consider her enfeebled as well as emaciated?"

"I consider her in a very bad way, Ma'am. I really know not what to make of it all! But to *my* mind, a young lady whom I leave barely to be called asleep at four in the morning, and whom I find lying wide awake in her bed when I go in with her breakfast at ten, can't be said to be in a natural state of health. Then, as to the breakfast part of the story, I'm sure, Ma'am, you must remember how, in the school-room, Lady Alicia was ready for her tea, and bread and butter, all the same as the other young ladies; and now, she won't hear of anything of the kind. I've tried her with tea, coffee, cocoa, chocolate, and the stuff what the French cook calls *Rackyhoo Daisyrab*. But all in vain! nothing will she touch; not so much as the lightest biscuit; and for lunch, only may be an ice, or something of that kind. And then, Mr. Thompson tells me, when my

Lord or Mr. Chichester notices at dinner that she eats nothing, and jokes her about the lady-fashion of dining on a capital luncheon that they may seem to live on air, not a word does Lady Alicia utter in self-windication. And so you see, Ma'am, what with one thing and another, nobody notices that the poor child eats nothing. But I must say, that when young folks has not their rest and appetite, I don't see much more they've got to lose—except their life!"

"This is really a most alarming account, Wallis!"—said Mrs. Bennet, with a sorrowful face. "Alicia has no cough, I think?"

"Not at present, Ma'am."

"Nor pain in the side?"

"Not as I'm aware on, Ma'am."

"Do you know, Wallis, I have a great mind, without saying a word to alarm Lord Grandison, to consult Sir Lucius Flimsy?"

"Lord bless you, Ma'am if you were to

send for him, Lady Alicia would only laugh, and tell him there was nothing on earth the matter with her."

"But she need not see him; she need know nothing about it. *You* can relate the symptoms to him, Wallis, as you have done to me; and we can take his advice, and no one be a bit the wiser."

"No one, indeed! To my thinking—begging your pardon, Mrs. Bennet—Sir Lucius Flimsy is but an old woman after all!"

"Perhaps so. But old women's remedies, in cases of sickness, are not always to be despised."

"Of course, Ma'am, you can do as you like," rejoined the waiting-maid; "but unless he orders an end to be put to all these late hours and racketing, I wouldn't give much for his art, no, not if he was the whole college of physicians boiled down to a composing-draught."

Summoned by the governess, as if for one of his usual attendances upon the school-room, the bland physician soon made his appearance in Park Lane; assuming, however, on learning the real state of the case, a face of corresponding length to the very long face with which Mrs. Bennet recapitulated the afflicting facts detailed to her by the waiting-maid. A slight and transient gleam of mirth appeared to traverse his eyes as he listened; but his mouth retained all its professional gravity. If the real nature of Lady Alicia's disorder occurred to his mind, he, of course, said nothing so decisive as to render his further visits superfluous; but with a few of those vague murmurs of "languid state of the circulation," "enfeebled condition of the constitution," with which courtly physicians accompany the curly-eared R. prefacing their infliction upon the ingenuous youth of either sex, of three vials of rosewater a day, acidulated with one drop of

diluted sulphuric acid, he took his fee and his leave, and promised to return in a day or two, for a second conference with the governess; a conference almost as secret and mysterious as those reported to be held at the Foreign Office by Don Sanchez Gaspardo di Torres Vedras!

The pink draughts, however, though offered by Mrs. Bennet as a suggestion of her own, were resolutely declined by Lady Alicia de Wendover.

“What can make you fancy, dearest Mrs. Bennet, that I am ill?”—cried she. “I am only doing a little too much of every thing!—dancing too much, singing too much, playing too much on the harp, and riding too much in the sun. In five weeks, we shall all be down at Grandison again; and then you will find me eat, drink, and sleep, as well as ever. As to my growing thin, don’t believe a word of it! It is an invention of Wallis’s to cover my sin of lacing for a shape.”

“*You* lace for a shape, my dear Alicia? you who—” Mrs. Bennet checked herself as she was about to enlarge upon the nymph-like proportions of her pupil’s form. “At all events,” she resumed, “oblige me by taking these strengthening draughts, which are what Sir Lucius prescribed for your sister last year, when recovering from her fever.”

“But I have had no fever, and have no faith in Sir Lucius,” cried the poor girl, aware, perhaps, that a whole apothecary’s shop would be unavailable to cure her sleeplessness. “If you want to see me look as well and merry as ever, my dear friend, bid Helen and Mary put on their bonnets, and bring them with me to take a stroll in Kensington Gardens this fine day, instead of wearying over their lessons.”

“You have readily adopted Lord Grandison’s opinions, my dear Alice, concerning the fruitlessness of lessons. However, I will not refuse you, as you have refused *me*. Order the carriage, and in five minutes we will be ready for you.”

In five minutes, accordingly, they set off in high spirits. But as the carriage started from the door, after a single glance down Upper Grosvenor Street, Lady Alicia's smiles vanished as if by magic. Mrs. Bennet could not conjecture why. *Her* eye had taken the same direction as that of her young friend; and all it lighted upon at that early hour, between Park Lane and Grosvenor Square, were a dust-man's dray, a boy with pewter-pots ringing at an area-gate, and a bay horse led up and down by a young gentleman, whose habiliments were in so precarious a condition, that he was obliged to gather up the nether portion, for better security, with his left hand, while holding the horse's bridle loosely in his right. Certainly there was nothing in the aspect of the dust-cart, the pot-boy, or the bay horse, to convert Lady Alicia's merry mood into sadness; and if her feelings were moved by the plight of the ragged urchin officiating as page to the latter, nothing would have been easier

than to stop the carriage and dispatch the footman with a shilling or half-crown for his relief.

But instead of stopping the carriage, Lady Alicia only leant back, silently, in the furthest corner ; nor, as they proceeded to the Gardens, was she to be roused to a more communicative vein by the inquiries of her sisters, of—" Alice, dear Alice, is this the part of the park where you ride with papa ? Is it here you drive with Lady Gransden ?"

Lady Alicia answered kindly, but briefly. Her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. Even when they arrived in the Gardens, (the deep verdure and tranquillity of which happened to be enhanced by the fragrance of the recently cut hay, presented an agreeable variety to the younger girls accustomed only to a dull dusty walk every day in the park,) Lady Alicia took little notice of their raptures ; and after sitting a quarter of an hour with them in the old-fashioned yew-walk, whose trim hollies speak

forcibly of the days of Queen Mary and Queen Caroline, and their phlegmatic High and Low Dutch spouses, she suddenly started up in the midst of the first blackbird's song the girls had heard that season, and proposed returning home.

Every thing proposed or done by Alicia, seemed right to her sisters, who regarded her with feelings little short of adoration; but Mrs. Bennet could not help feeling vexed at the abruptness of her manner and the selfishness of her conduct. She began to fear that her Alice was irrecoverably changed; and that all the draughts creatable per stroke of the pens of Sir Lucius Flimsy and Co.,

Would never medicine her to that sweet state  
Which she own'd yesterday!

Mrs. Bennet was actually all but tempted to declare her anxieties to the Earl; but as the last time of her troubling him, with similar importunities his Lordship had bidden her

restrict her jurisdiction to the school-room, she was apprehensive that further officiousness might induce him to hint that her services might be altogether dispensed with.

“ If it goes on,” murmured the good governess, as she opened, for the thousandth time, the huge school-room atlas, over which for the last five-and-twenty years she had been performing her daily travels, “ I can think of nothing better than to ask the advice of Lady Mary Langley. *She* has the greatest influence over my Lord, and loves my dear Alice almost as if she were a child of her own. There were none of these megrims in the poor girl’s head so long as Lady Mary remained her chaperon. It is all since she kept company with that flighty Viscountess, the mischief has arisen. Ah ! I was very wrong—very, *very* wrong, to say anything to Lord Grandison about the danger of Lady Alicia’s forming an attachment to young Langley if allowed to spend her whole time with his mother and sisters ; for

though my Lord pretended not to listen, it was scarcely a week afterwards that he made arrangements for his daughter to take a share in Lady Gransden's Opera-box, and be constantly in her society. I was very wrong! for after all, it would be far better for her to marry at once, and be under the protection of a husband, than left as she is by her father to follow her own devices; and if Lady Alicia *should* marry, though certainly with every right to pretend to rank and fortune, what could she do better than select the son of her poor dear mother's earliest friend, who would treat her as a daughter rather than a daughter-in-law. I was very wrong!"—again repeated Mrs. Bennet, folding back the map of Asia Minor the wrong way, in her absence of mind; "for now every chance of that connection is at an end. She scarcely ever sees the Langleys; and it would not at all surprise me to hear of Lady Alicia accepting that horrible eldest son of the Duchess of Woolwich who is making up to

her ; who spent two fortunes before he came of age, and would certainly break her heart in a twelvemonth."

Cecilia Langley, meanwhile, under a mother's wholesome governance, (the sole authority whose influence over a young heart is of a sufficiently tender nature to maintain its supremacy without inspiring awe or repressing the expansion of confidence), was gradually recovering her spirits. Lady Mary had bidden her exert herself for her mother's sake ; an appeal which the heart and mind of poor Cecilia dared not disregard.

Still, Lady Mary was not altogether happy on her account. She saw her constantly thrown into the society of Lord Chichester ;—constantly his partner in the dance, his companion at the *déjeûner* or picnic. Though Augustus often laughingly referred to his cousin's devotion to Lady Gransden, affecting to doubt whether his visits in Grosvenor Street were addressed to the Viscountess, or to the young heiress who

was now her constant companion, it was clear to Lady Mary, that whenever election was possible, it was rather to the side of her daughter that he attached his attendance.

One morning, at a brilliant archery meeting held at one of the beautiful villas of Roehampton, it was Lord Chichester's fortune to obtain the prize of the day; which, the fête being given by one of the most chivalrous of bachelor lords, consisted of a lady's broach, a costly heartshaped opal set with brilliants, bearing on the reverse the usual inscription of such ready-made gallantries—"à la plus belle."

Scarcely had Chichester received the trinket from the hands of the Duchess of Woolwich, who was officiating as Lady Paramount, when Lady Mary plainly perceived Lord Delmaine making signs to his son to come to him; to which Lord Chichester, just as plainly, chose to remain wilfully blind. It is true, half the beauties of the party came crowding round him, (as people are sure to crowd round any indi-

vidual who has anything in his hands to give away), requesting leave to look at his prize. "It was the prettiest thing," "the sweetest," "the most elegant," "the most lovely," that each or any of these darling disinterested creatures "had ever seen in their lives."

Lord Chichester allowed the glittering toy to pass from hand to hand, and be shone upon by all the brightest eyes in London. But it was observed that he never lost sight of his broach; and paid no sort of attention to the laudation bestowed upon it by the chorus of melodious voices devoting themselves to hymn the praises of a pear-shaped opal set with brilliants. At length, Lord Delmaine having gradually made his way round the outskirts of the white robed crowd standing adoringly before his son, Lord Chichester took, nay, almost snatched, from the hands of Lady Juliana Ridley, the Duchess of Woolwich's youngest daughter, the glittering treasure on which she had fixed a covetous eye, and glided off towards a little knoll hard by,

crowned by a sweeping cedar, under whose musky shade sat a charming group composed of Lady Mary Langley and her daughter, Lady Gransden and Lady Alicia de Wendover, with *quantum suff* of attendant swains.

The Earl of Delmaine followed his movements with an anxious eye; and the Earl of Delmaine's eyes, when anxious, greatly resembled those of a full grown jaguar. To his paternal hopes, the moment was to be decisive. Chichester would certainly tender the reward of his adroitness to the lady of his secret love; and to which of the three goddesses, in that miniature Ida, was he about to offer the apple? Was it the heiress, the Viscountess, the insignificant cousin? Lord Delmaine felt that his triumph would be too big for words, should the broach be offered to, and accepted by the lady of the Wilsmere woodlands; but he would have preferred even the inferences of a guilty passion arising from his tendering the gift to Lady Gransden, to seeing it betray the attachment

of his only son to the daughter of Morison Langley.

Chichester was half up the knoll, and Lady Alicia did not so much as notice his approach ; so attentively was she listening to a laughable anecdote with which Augustus Langley was entertaining her neighbour, Lady Gransden. But Lady Mary Langley was clearer sighted ; and accosted him without reserve, with congratulations on his success, and a request to look at his prize.

“ It is not exactly the most useful thing they could have selected for a gentleman,” said she, “ but I dare say it will please Lady Delmaine. She was too ill, I find, to bring Lady Charlotte here this morning. It is fortunate that you will be able to afford the invalid so agreeable a surprise.”

Lady Mary spoke in a measured voice, as if desirous to indicate to her young friend what he *ought* to do with the broach. But Chichester was not to be so easily schooled.

“My mother has already more jewels than she knows how to wear,” was his steady reply.

“I shall really feel some pride in my success and pleasure in the prize, if you will permit me to offer it to my cousin Cecilia.”

“It is much too rich an ornament for Cissy’s age,” said Lady Mary, having ascertained by a glance towards Cecilia, that her cheeks were flushed of the deepest crimson, so as to offer only too eloquent a reply to her cousin’s request. “I should not allow her to wear it, even were it offered by some friend from whom she could accept it with propriety.”

Encouraged, however, by Cecilia’s blushes, Lord Chichester persisted ; till at length, perceiving that the altercation was beginning to attract more attention than was desirable, she observed : “Since you are so wilful in your munificence, allow me, my dear Chichester, to compromise the matter in a way that I fear will not be very flattering to your vanity, I

beg it of you for myself. A dulcinea of fifty-five will be a new feature in the annals of chivalry."

And while Cissy, in the joy of her heart, could scarcely forbear a smile at her cousin's crest-fallen countenance, Lady Mary fastened the broach to her *mantelet*. On raising her eyes from the operation, she saw those of the Earl of Delmaine darting daggers at herself and her daughter.

It was not this, however, which determined her, on her return home, to enclose the trinket to Belgrave Square, with a note to Lady Delmaine, telling her it was "the reward of Lord Chichester's address, of which she had taken charge at the Roehampton fête, to be conveyed to his mother." Such was, from the first, her intention. She had merely accepted the broach, in order to put an end to the discussion, and distract attention from the confusion of her daughter. It was enough, alas! that it had been manifested to Lord Chichester. No

need to render poor Cis's weakness the talk of all the talkers in town.

This little incident was the source of much uneasiness to Lady Mary. She had never, for a moment, flattered herself that such a man as Lord Delmaine was likely to sanction a disinterested marriage on the part of his son. But the eager eyes she had seen him dart upon poor Chichester as he passed before Lady Alicia de Wendover to tender his gift to his cousin, convinced her that, whatever were Lord Grandison's views for his heiress, those of Lord Delmaine for his son were to get possession *de par l'église* of the Wilsmere estates, let the young man's affections be ever so deeply engaged to another. She saw, too, by his infuriated glance towards herself and Cissy, that the Earl had detected the latter as the obstacle to the accomplishment of his projects. If, therefore—even if Chichester should really entertain a preference for his cousin, it was clear

that the displeasure of the Earl would still render their union impossible.

The sober-looking chaperon, whose crape turban and pearl grey satin dress made the respectable appearance formerly described by Mrs. Knox, that same evening on the uppermost bench at Almacks, was far more perplexed than was conjectured even by those who noticed that her head beat false time to the orchestra, albeit its measure was enforced by a record so audible as Dufresne's cornet à piston. As she sat there "nid-nid-nodding," with vague, inexpressive countenance, her thoughts were far away. She was looking into the distance of years. She was anticipating evil for her child. She was wondering how a man so wise in his generation as Morison Langley, had ever overlooked the perils contingent upon the visits of a handsome young cousin of five and twenty to the solitudes of Langley Park !

As the evil was so much of his creation, it was, at least, his business to suggest a remedy ; and Lady Mary felt that the time was imperatively come to seek his counsel. Much as she was disinclined to harass him with domestic cares, he *must* be told that his darling daughter's happiness was in danger ; that his family honour was in danger ; that, should he persist in inviting Lord Chichester constantly to his house, he would pass in the eyes of Lord Delmaine, and perhaps be made by Lord Delmaine to pass in those of the world, for a long-headed, designing man, whose well calculated attentions had succeeded in entrapping, as a son-in-law, the son and heir of an opulent Earl.

No wonder that, while pursuing this train of cogitations, Lady Mary should have been so thoroughly self-engrossed that, at the close, she was fain to apologize to her next neighbour, Lady Halidown, for having made a tremendous

rent in her Brussels' point, with the incrusted sticks of a fan, à la Louis XIV, which she had been agitating with unconscious vehemence.

## CHAPTER VII.

With that low cunning which in fools supplies  
And amply too, the place of being wise,  
Which nature, kind indulgent parent gave,  
To qualify the blockhead for a knave,  
Which to the lowest depths of guile descends,  
And with vile means pursues the vilest ends.

CHURCHILL.

“VAUX !” cried the Dowager to her butler, hobbling from the dining-room window to the breakfast-table, with her spectacles pushed up over her forehead, “the water in this urn does not boil ! It is a very extraordinary thing that you will *never* look after the men when preparing breakfast !”

"I'm sure, my Lady, there oughtn't never be no want of hot water in this house!"—replied the jocose Mr. Vaux, after ascertaining by a glance round the room, that he was tête-à-tête with the old lady.

"The dry toast, too, is quite leathery; just the abominable stuff one gets at an inn. I choose my dry toast being as brittle as glass, and as thin as a wafer."

"Yes, my Lady."

"And pray let Cullum know that it is high time the breakfast-pats were sent in ice. You might roll these round your finger. What are you smiling at, Sir?"

"My Lady, I was not smiling, I was thinking, perhaps, standing so near the tea-urn might prevent the butter from keeping so cool as it ought; more particular, as I'm obliged to keep the dining-room windows shut all the morning, at this time of year, on account of the dust."

"It was *you* then who fastened down the

windows? I have just broken my nails in trying to open the spring. Pray can you tell me, Vaux, what travelling-carriage it was that just drove away from Lord Gransden's door?"

"A yellow post-chariot, my Lady."

"Yes, I saw the colour;—I mean, do you know to whom it belongs?"

"Most likely to the two gentlemen which came in it, my Lady."

"Did you hear whether the footman told the postboy to take it round to Lord Gransden's stables, or to some coachmaker's? The windows being shut, I couldn't exactly manage to hear what he said."

"I wasn't a-listening, my Lady. I was helping Mrs. Wilson a-frothing Lady Meliora's chocolate."

"You did not see the two gentlemen get out of the carriage, then, and go into the house?"

"No, my Lady."

“Then who could it be who was standing on my door-steps at the time? It *must* have been one of the men; for I heard the street-door slam, and some one cross the hall immediately afterwards.”

“If it is of any consequence to your Ladyship, I will make it my business to find out. John, pray were you standing just now at the hall-door, when a travelling-carriage and pair drove up to Lord Gransden’s?”

“I was paying for a twopenny post letter, Sir,” stammered the footman.

“Then why haven’t you given it to me?” cried the Dowager.

“I didn’t know, my Lady, as I was to give the cook’s letter to your Ladyship.”

“Oh! it was for the cook, was it?—What business have such people with correspondence, I wonder?”—she continued, scarcely aside.

“And pray, John, since you *was* a-standing at the hall-door at the time,” resumed Mr.

Vaux, "where did my Lord's people order the carriage to? My Lady wishes particular to know."

"I rayther think to the mews, Sir. As it warn't no business of mine, Mr. Vaux, I didn't pay no great attention."

"In future, John, take more notice," said Vaux, winking aside to his underling. "It's impossible for you to guess, you know, when you may be called upon for information."

"You saw the two gentlemen, you say, step out of the carriage?"—inquired Lady Delmaine, starting out of a reverie, during which her downcast eyes had remained plunged into the sugar-bason.

"I did, my Lady,—if your Ladyship means *me*," said John, retouching the symmetry in which the eggstand and muffineer were made to adorn the breakfast-table.

"What sort of gentlemen were they?"

"Like other sort of gentlemen, my Lady; that is, not *quite* like other sort of gentlemen,

for the elder on'em wore a green single-breasted coat, and t'other were in gaiters; much of a muchness, my Lady, with the look of Mr. Morison Langley."

"Oh! a country-gentleman—a squire?"

"Thereabouts, my Lady."

"Lady Gransden's father, I have not the least doubt!" cried the Dowager. "And his companion?"

"A gentleman of no age at all, my Lady."

"What do you mean by that, pray?"

"I mean a gentleman between thirty and forty, my Lady—what sometimes looks thirty and sometimes forty, according as he's dressed."

"Perhaps it was Mr. Oakham's servant. Gentlemen who were born before rumbles came into fashion, often travel with their servants."

"Perhaps it was, my Lady; for I heard the old gentleman call him John, and bid him see that the postboy was paid. And so, as I was mentioning just now below, when your Ladyship's bell rang—"

“What are you chattering about?”—cried the Dowager, resuming her dignity on hearing at that moment, the voice of her son in the hall, inquiring for the newspapers. “Go down, Vaux;—go down, John; and, remember for the future, that there is nothing concerning which I am more particular, than having the water for tea boiled to a bubble.”

“So Lord Gransden has sent for his wife’s relations I find?”—said the Dowager to Johnny Chichester and his sister, who now entered the room together.

“But will they come when he doth call for them?”—replied Johnny Chichester, coolly. “Country gentlemen are busy at this time of year, hoeing their turnips, or getting in their beans, or their pease, or their something or other.”

“Mr. Oakham, nevertheless, is already arrived.”

“You are quite mistaken, Ma’am,” replied the contradictory Lady Meliora. “Lady Gransden was at the fête at Roehampton till

ten o'clock last night;—as usual, the last person there; and would scarcely have been so ungracious as to remain so long absent, with her father in the house. Besides, I was looking steadfastly over the way through my glass, at about eight o'clock, and the rooms being lighted, distinctly saw the Viscount dining alone. He had two artichokes in the second course."

"All very likely, my dear. But you are somewhat behind-hand in your information, for it was this morning that Mr. Oakham arrived."

"God bless my soul! without his wife?"

"Without his wife—which, you will admit, looks as if the business he came upon was indeed of a most delicate nature!"

"Is the business, then, in which ladies are permitted to participate, necessarily of an *inde*licate nature?"—demanded Johnny, stirring his tea. "I had a better opinion of you all!"

"I mean that, since Lady Gransden's con-

duct is such as to call for the intervention of her father, her mother has been very properly spared so afflicting a meeting.”

“But may not Mr. Oakham of Hanbury Park be come to town on business of his own devising?”—inquired Johnny Chichester; “country-gentleman’s business—to buy nets for his cherry-trees, or see the wax-work?”

“Do you suppose Mr. Oakham would travel post all night merely to purchase nets for his cherry-trees or see the wax-work? His carriage was so dusty that it looked like a miller’s cart.”

“No wonder!—since he came expressly to kick up a dust.”

“Ah! well—laugh as much as you please. But see whether Mr. Oakham will consider it as good a joke as you appear to do, that Lady Gransden should receive furtive visits from a Carlist spy—from that jackanapes of a Spaniard—that dandified Don Sanchez Gaspardo

di Torres Vedras, whom you yourself saw come sneaking out of her house, only a few days ago."

"Don what?—A Carlist spy?" cried Johnny Chichester, with some difficulty repressing his laughter. "Upon my life, mother, you are too bad. When will you cease to exercise this sort of inquisition upon your neighbours?"

"When my neighbours cease to give me occasion for it," replied the Dowager, tartly. "Do you suppose that it is a pleasant thing for a woman of my age and habits—a woman, I am bold to say, who has gone through life without a blemish large enough for the most potent microscope to bring to light upon her reputation—a woman who, please God, hopes to end her days in peace and quietness, and charity with the world—is it pleasant, do you suppose, to have such a set of pinketing, rack-eting, light-headed young folks as these Gransdens, Sir Henry Windsor, and Mrs.

Knox, constantly before my eyes ?—Why it was only yesterday I saw a lady of the most equivocal appearance, in a pink bonnet with marabout feathers, step out of a carriage at Sir Henry's door ; one of those dark chariots without arms, which always look so suspicious. Meliora will have it that it was only his sister, Mrs. Vere ; but *I* know better. I happen to be certain that Mrs. Vere succeeded Sir Henry in his attendance on old Windsor in Surrey."

"I beg your pardon—I fancied old Windsor was in Berkshire?" said Johnny, hoping to put an end to her tirade.

"How often must I tell you, brother, that mamma considers a pun very little short of an insult !"—cried Lady Meliora, with indignation.

"I shall be extremely happy to give her Ladyship satisfaction," replied Johnny, with much solemnity. "It is the study of my life to give satisfaction."

"Then why presume to blame my being sensible to the mortification of having outlived

all my contemporaries in this street?" And the Dowager, tapping the crown of her egg as vehemently as if it were spite that instigated her to break its head. "When I first resided in this house, and for many years afterwards when you were at Eton and college, regardless of such matters—"

"I beg your pardon again. You have always protested that the only matters of which I was regardless, were money-matters."

"At that time," continued the Dowager, not deigning to notice his jocularities, "there lived in the three houses opposite, the old Duchess of Droningfield, (who had been paralytic for twenty years, and was so grateful when one dropped in to make up her limited loo!) the poor, dear, good old Bishop of Armagh, (who was stone-blind, and the best creature in the universe—pleased as a child with any little anecdote one might have to relate to him); and three highly respectable maiden ladies, the Miss Grampuses (whom

that saucy fellow, old Townsend used to call battle, murder, and sudden-death, from their frightful appearance in their box at the Opera, but who were always vastly agreeable at their own little tea-parties) ! Now just compare such neighbours as those, with a young rake, and two trifling young women, utterly insignificant!"

"Half a dozen old women, including the Bishop, against two young ones and a dandy, who being secondary to his tailor, I consider the tenth part of a man ! I back Mrs. Knox and Lady Gransden !" cried Johnny.

"If you account Sir Henry Windsor only the tenth part of a man, I am sure Mrs. Knox is only the twentieth part of a woman," interrupted Lady Meliora. "If the chancellor of the exchequer were to put a tax upon bandboxes, the country would never be a bankrupt while there were Mrs. Knoxes in the world. I wish the poor General joy of all the bills likely to

remind him, next New Year's day, that Mrs. Knox went to the Queen's ball last night. From six till ten o'clock, if you'll believe me, there were twenty or thirty rings at the bell; and I could plainly see, by the gas-light, that every one of the people brought something from the mantuamaker's—something from the milliner's—something from the florist's—something from the haberdasher's—something from the glover's—something from the hosier's—something from the perfumer's—something from the hair-dresser's—something from the jeweller's—something from—"

"HOLD, *enough!*"—cried Johnny, in the tone of Macready's Macbeth. "Would you have me believe that all these somethings are necessary to compose that less than nothing—an insignificant woman?"

"I mean to tell you, that twice as much is put in requisition in order to compose the Mrs. Knox you see in company, and whom all

the world pronounces such a vastly pretty woman!" cried Lady Meliora. "Just look at her some morning before she is dressed."

"Your Ladyship forgets yourself," said Johnny Chichester, affecting to be shocked.

"I mean before she is dressed *out*. Look at her, as I sometimes do, when she comes to her dressing-room window, the moment she is up, to examine the weather and ascertain whether it promises well for the vanity-fair of the day. In her dressing-gown, Mrs. Knox is thinner than a lath!"

"So am I in mine, *when I'm a shaving*," said Johnny, regardless of Lady Meliora's diatribe against puns.

"Her face is sallow, her countenance, when unrelieved by curls, heavy and unmeaning; and she is no more like the Mrs. Knox of Almacks, than a painter's layman without its drapery, to the Cleopatra or Mary Queen of Scots, which it figured the preceding day."

"And how looks the fair Lady Gransden in

her night-cap?" inquired Johnny. "Remember, I do not enjoy your facilities for these observations. My room looks backwards."

"And Lady Gransden's also," cried the Dowager, peevishly. "When first the Gransdens took the house, she had the front room—the best bed-chamber—the room occupied by the poor Bishop, and all the preceding proprietors of the house. But she had not been here two months, forsooth, before she chose to change it for one, not half the size!"

"Perhaps because her present room catches a glimpse of the gardens of Grosvenor House."

"No such thing."

"Perhaps because of the larger one, your Ladyship commanded somewhat *more* than a glimpse?"—observed Johnny.

"I am sure," resumed the Dowager, not heeding his impertinent rejoinder, "if this were not a dower-house, I would have parted with it fifteen years ago."

“ But, as in other cases of separation, you would require a separate maintenance, and house rent being high—”

“ If Lord Delmaine had the least regard to my feelings, he would have allowed me to let it on my own account, as I once proposed to him, and take one in a more agreeable situation,” interrupted the Dowager.

“ So as to enable Lady Gransden to occupy her best bed-room,” muttered Johnny.

“ But in that, as in all other matters of business with him, I met with nothing but opposition,” continued the Dowager. “ My only comfort is, that if Lady Delmaine persuades him into a trial of homœopathy as she expects, his liver complaint will soon place me in the hands of his son ; and though I know little in favour of Lord Chichester, it is some comfort that he *can't* be so shabby or so impracticable as I always find his father.”

Johnny Chichester, rising from the breakfast-table, suddenly broke up the conversation.

There were times when the Dowager gave utterance to sentiments too atrocious to be laughed at. There were times when there was something impish in the cackling laugh by which they were accompanied.

Very different, meanwhile, was the mood of mind in which the travellers crossed the threshold of the opposite mansion. The emotion of poor Oakham, on approaching London after his night's travelling, had been such that John Evelyn insisted upon his passing a quiet quarter of an hour at Barnet, to refresh himself, previous to whatever further trials might await him.

But on entering the street inhabited by his son-in-law, all his former tremours returned. If Laura should have quitted her husband's protection! If, instead of his once duteous—once virtuous—and still fondly beloved child, he should find only the stern countenance and desolate fireside of the miserable husband? John Evelyn saw that his companion was gasp-

ing for breath when the carriage drew up to the door.

“Command yourself, my dear Sir,” cried he. “Reflect, that should our information prove premature, and our fears have outstripped the truth, we should be inexcusable in conveying suspicions to Lord Gransden’s mind. I entreat you, exert your fortitude !”

And thus admonished, Oakham contrived to assume a composed countenance as he entered the house.

“Lord and Lady Gransden ?”—said he with a smile, to the servants, who had tasted the strong ale of hospitable Hanbury Park often enough to be almost inclined to bid the squire heartily welcome to London.

“My Lord is breakfasting in my Lady’s dressing-room, Sir. Won’t you be pleased to walk up ?—Won’t the other gentleman step into the drawing-room ?—Shall I settle with the boy ?—Would you wish to go into my

Lord's room to wash your hands?"—cried the civil fussy butler, without waiting a reply to any one of his questions.

"Don't announce me; I will go in and surprise them. Take care of my son-in-law, Mr. Evelyn," said Oakham, walking slowly up stairs, in the hopes of subduing emotions alas! irrepressible. Yet when he reached the dressing-room door, and was about to turn the handle, his temples throbbed more painfully than ever. In what state of mutual feeling was he about to find those whose happiness was so dear to him? He took courage, at length, to throw open the door, but only to stand rooted to the threshold.

Much have those "sweet writers," the elegiac poets, enlarged upon the elegant domesticity of the tea-table, the "bubbling and loud-hissing urn," and so forth. But let a simple proser be believed, that the truly domestic meal is breakfast;—breakfast with its steaming

*café au lait*, its transparent slices of Westphalian ham, its smoking muffins, and reeking morning papers.

At such a feast, in a simple dressing-room, undisfigured by the gilding and frippery peculiar to the boudoirs of *parvenue* Countesses and the vulgar fine, sat Lord Gransden in his chintz dressing-gown, with his wife leaning familiarly over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of a criticism upon the last new opera in the Morning Post, which his Lordship, per privilege of sex, chose to monopolize. One of the prettiest white hands in the world rested upon his shoulder; which, as

Crimson and green was the chintz of his wear,

was charmingly thrown out by the depth of its rich dark hues; while the other hand kept back Laura's silken ringlets from intercepting her view of the paper. A cheerful smile was upon her lips; and in the expression of Lord Gransden's countenance as

much conjugal happiness was concentrated as ever brightened the looks of man, from the days when Adam was content to pick posies and listen to nightingales in company with his sinless Eve.

“Papa! my dear, dear papa!”—exclaimed Laura, darting forward and throwing her arms round Mr. Oakham’s neck, as the sound of his quickened respiration met her ear. “This is, indeed, taking us by surprise!”—And her father, as she withdrew a moment from his embrace to look up into his face, saw in an instant that all was well. There was such unclouded joy in her smile, such feminine tenderness in her blush!

Upon her brow shame was ashamed to sit!

He strained her tenderly to his heart. She was his own girl still—his darling Laura. Evelyn was a blockhead—Lady Seldon an intermeddling fool—the world a liar!—All were to blame except his beloved—his slandered daughter!

All this time, Lord Gransden and his “How are you, my dear Oakham?”—were standing unanswered. It was not for a minute or two, that the agitated father recovered himself sufficiently to snatch the Viscount’s hand between his own, and shake it heartily. Lord Gransden saw that tears stood in his father-in-law’s eyes; but as Oakham had already vouchsafed a satisfactory answer to his “All well at home, I hope?”—there were no grounds for imputing his emotion to more than the joy of seeing his favourite daughter again after three months’ absence. Gransden was far too good-natured a fellow to discover cause for ridicule in the excess of feeling of any mortal living.

“Did Mrs. Oakham receive my *cadeau* before you left Hanbury?” said he. “Laura wanted to make me keep the picture for a fine frame to be finished. But I judged of your wife, by myself; and felt sure she would not lose the enjoyment of her daughter’s picture for three or four weeks, for all the frames that ever were carved and gilt.”

There was not much in these words, yet every one of them caused the father's heart to thrill. They contained a respite from such deep despair; a certification of such perfect happiness; a reprieve from family disgrace; a balm for parental agony. Till that moment, Oakham scarcely knew what he had been suffering for the last six and thirty hours; as by the soreness of the limbs in recovering from an accident, we appreciate the greatness of the shock.

"You are come to spend some time with us, I hope?" said Lord Gransden, placing a chair for him at the little breakfast-table, which was so strictly conjugal as scarcely to admit a third person.

"I'm afraid I can't sit down with you," said Oakham, looking affectionately at them both. "John Evelyn accompanied me to town."

"Evelyn?"—exclaimed Lord Gransden, with hospitable glee. "I'm deuced glad to hear it. Laura and I have invited him here a hundred times; but he always said he could neither

leave nor bring his family. Where is he? Why didn't he come up with you?"

"I wish he had," observed Mr. Oakham, with a significance not to be understood by his son-in-law. "But I left him settling for the horses. It is scarcely worth while to put your people out by quartering ourselves upon you during our short stay in town. We can get beds at Mivart's or Scaife's, and be with you as often as you like to have us."

"I shall be much hurt if either of you refuse to become my guest," cried the young Viscount, in all sincerity. "We have a spare bed-room, with a dressing-room that holds a bed. You will put no one out of his way. At present, we have plenty of room for you," said he, with a smiling glance at his wife. "At present, you know, we are not so much family people as to occupy our whole house. Next year, I don't answer for the spare bed-room. But I must go and fetch up Evelyn."

And down stairs he ran after his brother-in-law, who was so anxiously pacing the drawing-room, that had not the Dowager been at that moment reprimanding Vaux about the tea-urn, instead of occupying her usual post of observation, her surmises would have been strangely excited by the agitated gestures of the strange gentleman at Lord Gransden's.

"My dear girl!—if you did but know what joy it affords me to find you so happy," cried poor Oakham, profiting by his tête-à-tête with his daughter to fold her in another hearty embrace.

"Happy indeed," replied Lady Gransden. "Except that dear mamma has not accompanied you to town, I have not a wish on earth ungratified."

"And there has been no cloud—no interval?"—inquired the fond father, fixing upon Laura's sweet face, one of those kindly searching looks of tenderness which only a parent's eye can emit.

“None, none!” replied Lady Gransden, fervently. “I scarcely know how to be grateful enough for the blessings heaped upon me. I can safely assert, dearest father, that from the day of my quitting Hanbury, till this moment, not a harsh or hasty word has passed my husband’s lips towards me. Indeed, (as there is no one present to quiz the confession) I may be allowed to say, that I think we love each other better every day of our lives.”

Lord Gransden and Evelyn were standing close behind the happy couple who were still clasped in each other’s arms, as Laura uttered this frank declaration.

“Isn’t she a humbug?”—cried Lord Gransden, turning with a look of half confused delight towards his brother-in-law. “She heard us come into the room, and was in hopes of bribing me not to thrash her for the next six months, by all these fine speeches.”

But John Evelyn was sufficiently experienced in matrimonial life, to see at a glance that

Lady Gransden was sincere, and that perfect harmony prevailed in the household. In the confusion of taking possession of their rooms, he found a moment to offer his congratulations to Mr. Oakham.

“ Upon my soul, I hardly know what apology to make for the needless pain I have inflicted,” said he. “ What does that old hyena, Lady Seldon, deserve? At least to pay the cost of our journey. But I am resolved to bring her to account; I am resolved to sift the affair to the bottom.”

“ Not a word now ;—Gransden might hear you,” was Oakham’s mild reply.

“ I am come back again to warn you both,” said the Viscount, with a laughing face, half opening the door, “ that if you have any *very* horrible conspiracy to carry on in these rooms, draw down the blinds. We live in perpetual fear of the Inquisition. Right opposite is an old Dowager, who for spite and mischief, I would back against the united old maids of any

market town in Great Britain. Beware, or your proceedings, wrapt in the quaintest disguises, will find their way, in the course of twenty four hours, from one end of London to the other. You may smile, my dear Evelyn. But remember you are not at the Willows; and here, I can tell you, the Dowager Lady Delmaine and her scandals are anything but matter of jest."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Wonderful intimacies arise among the frivolous; as the lightest kinds of wood may be the closest glued together.

SHENSTONE.

AFTER as much rest and refreshment as was necessary to two travellers, whose labours had terminated so agreeably, Oakham and his son-in-law, declining all aid of Lord Gransden's horses and carriages, proceeded severally to their morning's amusements, with all the zest and flurry experienced by persons arriving in London, after a long absence, in the height of the season.

"Since we have come upon this fool's errand," was Oakham's judicious remark, "let

us even make the best of it, and enjoy ourselves."

And away he went across the squares, down Regent Street, across "Club-land—glorious land"—to wonder at St. James's Park, and introduce himself to the asphaltic pavement. As he drew nearer towards the parliamentary regions and purlieus of Chancery, where country gentlemen, when transplanted to town, most do congregate, he was more than once clapped, country gentlemanwise, on the back, with—"Oakham! my dear fellow, what the devil brings you to town?"—More people were rejoiced to see him than he had fancied London could supply to interest themselves in his comings and goings. He met, in short, almost as many familiar faces as if he had been trotting on his favourite cob from Hanbury Park to the justice meeting. It was—"Oakham, come with me a moment into the House. I want to talk to you about that petition I am to present from New Rasingham."—Or—"Oak-

ham, my dear fellow, step with me into Belamy's. You are just the man I wanted. I am up before the committee to-morrow about that d——d business at Losely, and you can give me the necessary information."—Or—"Oakham, a word with you—only a word, mind; for I am to meet my lawyer in the Hall at three."

The Squire was completely in his element. He had already made appointments with old friends and country neighbours, to visit Aldridge's and Tattersall's, to dine at the Albion and Lovegrove's, and to examine, Heaven knows how many patent machines for doing, in an uncommon way, all that our farming forefathers used to do in a common, when barley was reaped with a sickle and mangel wurzel unknown.

"I *must* have you come and see my new patent chaff-cutter before it is packed up," cried Sir Thomas Furrowbottom.

"You *must* look in at Oxenham's at my

bone-mill on the new principle, before it goes to the waggon office," shouted Bob Sheerwell, of Sheerwell Park.

"Have you heard of the new harrow? Pray contrive to meet me to-morrow at Hallam and Cottam's to see the new harrow," cried one of the agricultural peers of his county. "The cleverest thing you ever beheld in your life. The fellow has got the devil knows what for his patent, and so he ought; for, upon my soul, Sir, it is the finest invention that has come out since the steam engine!"

Even after extricating himself from these importunate friends, Oakham found it difficult to work his way from Parliament Street to Piccadilly. The shop windows, so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable to a London man, were replete with amusement for the country gentleman. It was nearly four years since Oakham was in London, (his last visit being to Gray's Inn, at the moment of drawing up Lady Gransden's marriage settlement,) and what

billions and trillions of inventions during that time! Every shop was a little world to him. The cutlers, ironmongers, lamp-makers, upholsterers, china manufacturers, glass-cutters, each tempted him in turn, with some novelty which he longed to carry down with him to Hanbury Park.

Then the equipages—those guarantees of national wealth—what light, easy, well-hung carriages—what capital horses; how famously well turned out! How different from the heavy ill-cleaned harness, and half-groomed nags of his country neighbours. Even the brewers' drays had merit in his eyes. "By Jupiter!—what animals!" he exclaimed, as one of Meux's finest teams passed him at Charing Cross.

"Lucky for me that I am wise enough to keep quiet in the country," mused the Squire, as he took his way homeward along Pall Mall. "Three or four seasons in town, and I scarcely know where I should look for the money for

William's troop, or the living I have promised to buy for Fred. Safe out of harm's way is the surest place for old blockheads like myself, who don't know how to resist temptation." And so saying, he marched straight into Howell and James's shop, and bought a French clock as a present for his wife, besides a handsome shawl, and various other tempting articles of woman's gear. Elizabeth Evelyn and her children, too, were not forgotten.

"Poor girl!" said the happy father. "Lizzy deserves some compensation for this little break up of her domestic comfort. Like a good wife as she is, I know she can't bear parting with Evelyn."

At half-past five, he was in Grosvenor Street again, true to his habit of being at home in time for the dressing bell. But on finding the house deserted, and that he had still two idle hours before him, he sauntered into the Park, to admire, in a mass, the carriages and horses which had singly startled him by their beauty.

“Can any country in Europe, but England, I should like to know, produce such a display as this?”—exclaimed the Squire, taking possession of a seat near the well-watered drive, and gazing admiringly upon the handsome edifices of Park Lane, basking, with their gay verandahs and Genoese blinds, in the sunshine of a June afternoon, upon the bright open carriages with their many-coloured freight, like moving beds of tulips—upon the fair equestrians managing their thorough-bred steeds with such graceful ease—and even upon the tribes of fair-faced and richly dressed children sporting with their nursery-maids upon the grass. Nothing but opulence, nothing but luxury, nothing but health and hilarity within view.

“What a population!—what a country!” was the very natural ejaculation of one whose eyes, habituated to rustic uncouthness and country negligence, were doubly fascinated by refinements that pass unheeded of the customary loungers of the place; by the denizens of the

town, who would have been just as much struck by the pure verdure of Hanbury Park, and the rich foliage of its timber, compared with their sooty grass and dwarfish sad suited trees of the Park, as the Squire by its well-dressed woman and horses, and the varnish of its carriages and boots.

“Laura has a happy time of it,” was his next reflection, as he called to mind that Lady Gransden had carriages and saddle-horses at command, and was probably one of the fairest of the gay loungers in that brilliant throng.

Such was the elation of spirit in which Mr. Oakham returned home to dinner; excited like a child by all he had heard and seen, and with every intention of enjoying himself, to the utmost, during the week he proposed to stay in town. He had already written a letter of satisfactory explanation to his wife. After all, he was not sorry he had come. The sight of Laura, in the scene of her triumphs, made him feel young again. There was to be a drawing-

room on the Thursday. It was a foolish fancy, he admitted ; but he could not help feeling pleased at the opportunity of seeing his beautiful daughter dressed for court.

On arriving in Grosvenor Street, it was quite clear that John Evelyn had been spending the morning less agreeably than his father-in-law. There are some men whom travelling all night makes bilious—and being bilious, cross ; and Evelyn was both. He was rather affronted, moreover, that Oakham had not invited him to be the companion of his walk ; for though forced to accede to the Squire's remark, that they had better be independent, yet as he possessed, at five-and-twenty, less extended acquaintanceship than his father-in-law at sixty, Evelyn had not seen a soul he knew, though he had beat up several clubs with inquiries after country neighbours, and passed a whole hour in eating an ice in the front chair of Grange's shop.

Now, though it is not always pleasant to be

slapped on the back, or dragged by a blustering friend into Westminster Hall, to be wrecked upon a populous city where there is no familiar hand or importunate friend to perform such offices, is a disagreeable alternative. John Evelyn, whose temper was not altogether sound, and who was somewhat spoiled by the worship of his wife, was moved, alas ! to envy, by those elegancies and splendours which had excited only the admiration of his more cordial-hearted father-in-law. Instead of feeling proud that he belonged to a country so highly advanced in civilization, he felt provoked that his lot was not appointed among the gay frivolities of life. He sickened at the thought of the dull gravel walk at the Willows, and the quizzicality of his dennet, as he lounged along the crowded pavement of Bond-street, and stared into the coachmakers' windows. Yet the next moment, after being nearly run over by a fashionable phaeton, he was thanking Heaven that he was not as those Pharisees ;—that he was not forced

to pass his days in such a vortex of levity and noise ;—that he was spared the grinding of the street-organ, to which his bilious head-ache made him peculiarly sensitive, and an atmosphere, the sooty particles of which were demonstrated by every sparrow that hopped before him.

If the whole truth must be told, Evelyn's habitual jealousy of the Gransdens was returning, now that all fear of a misfortune impending over the Viscountess, had ceased to mollify his feelings towards her. It mortified him to remember how differently he had been able to welcome his father-in-law, when the Oakhams, twice since his marriage, had come to spend the month of Mrs. Evelyn's confinement at the Willows. In addition to his self-love as a host, his pride as a husband was wounded by the intensity of affection he had that morning seen Mr. Oakham lavish on his favourite daughter ;—a daughter dearer than ever, at that moment, to his heart, as if escaped from ship-

wreck, or some other mighty peril. And when, to crown his discontents, Mr. Oakham placed on the finger of his daughter, as she flew to the head of the stairs to welcome him back, a costly ring which he had purchased for her in the course of his morning's peregrinations, John Evelyn, who knew nothing of the contents of the numerous packets and parcels already deposited in Oakham's room, began to reflect that if his father-in-law increased the expenses of his sojourn in town by many such acquisitions, he would be exceedingly likely to overdraw his account at Drummond's.

"I have only invited one or two people to meet you, dear papa; particular friends, so intimate as to be asked without notice," said Laura, leading him into the drawing-room.

"My dear child, I should have been much better pleased with a family party."

"Oh! *these* persons are almost the same as my family; and I like you, my dearest father, to be acquainted with all my friends. I shall

invite the Langleys for Saturday, because I know how highly you regard Mr. Morison Langley."

"You know them, then? So much the better. You cannot associate with more respectable people. Whom do you expect to-day?"—he continued, fixing his eyes upon his daughter in admiration of the elegance of her dress and form; while Evelyn, on the other hand, remarked nothing in her appearance except that she was too much dressed for a small party in her own house, as her sister Elizabeth, on such an occasion, would have been satisfied with a morning gown.

"Lord Grandison and his daughter, and Lord Chichester," she replied; and her father was glad that John Evelyn happened to be looking over some H. Bs. at the other end of the room, as he would more willingly have received a box on the ear, than have heard the announcement of the latter name. For though his son-in-law, for prudential reasons, had

given a mere abstract of the information afforded by Lady Seldon, yet in the course of their journey of a hundred and eighty miles, he had more than once inadvertently let fall, that the son of the Earl of Delmaine was the man suspected of exercising an unlawful influence over the affections of Lady Gransden.

When, therefore, Lord Chichester made his entrée, with all the ease of *l'ami de la maison*, gay, graceful, smiling—handsomer than any one of the handsome young men whom Oakham had that morning admired in St. James's Street as the rising aristocracy of Great Britain—the squire received with a very ill grace, the courteous advances of the bosom friend of Lord Gransden; the fidus Achates selected by the Viscount's loving wife, to be his pilot through the rocks and shoals of Toryism. There was not, however, much leisure for the assumption of sternness. A moment afterwards, a portly middle-aged man, with a beautiful girl hanging on his arm, arrayed in the

bonnet and morning-dress so much approved by John Evelyn, made their appearance.

“Always at your orders, you see,” said he, shaking hands cordially with Lady Gransden. “Alice and I only received your note on returning from our ride; and instead of waiting for the carriage, we walked here at once.”

Not being aware that the walk in question, consisted of the hundred yards lying between a house in Park Lane and one in Upper Grosvenor Street, John Evelyn took little notice of the humble pedestrians, whose names he had not happened to hear announced, compared with the attention he could not but bestow upon Lord Chichester; in the first place, as a co-partner in Lady Gransden’s imputed guilt; in the second, as a young member of some reputation; and in the third, as the best dressed, best mannered and best looking man with whom he had ever happened to be in company. John Evelyn saw, at a glance, that he was a sadly dangerous fellow—a decided

*mangeur de cœurs*; and the friendly good humour with which Lord Gransden “Chichestered” him, and made him one of the family, and the almost sisterly familiarity with which Laura had the audacity to address him—more sisterly by far than her manner towards himself (which was not very wonderful, considering that she had seen him every day of the season and every season of her married life, whereas, she had not been twenty times in company with her brother-in-law), roused his utmost indignation.

Could the Dowager have suspected, as she stood, spectacles on nose, behind the crimson silk curtains, watching the arrival of the the dinner-guests at No. 4, that in the bosom of one of the party festered feelings nearly as venomous as those of her own, some species of telegraph, electric or magnetic, would certainly have been attempted, in order to quicken the perceptions of John Evelyn.

Nothing of the kind, however, being possible,

he got through his *printannier*, salmon, and glass of sherry, without exchanging more than monosyllables with the portly gentleman who sat all but unheeded between him and his sister-in-law.

“I expected to meet Augustus Langley,” observed his neglected neighbour to Lady Gransden, as if asking an explanation of the sixth chair which the servants had removed, on their sitting down to table.

“When I wrote to you this morning, I had hopes of him,” replied the Viscountess. “But we met Mr. Langley in the park, and found that he was to escort his mother and sister to some early concert.”

“Quite right,” was the reply. “Young Langley is the best son and brother of my acquaintance; an unfashionable qualification, perhaps, but one which I can’t help respecting.”

This little hint was addressed to Lord Chichester, (whom, since he was pointed out as

the object of Lady Alicia's affections, Lord Grandison had selected as that of his aversion), the rarity of his Lordship's appearance in public with Lady Delmaine and her daughter, being an undeniable delinquency; whereupon John Evelyn, pleased to notice that the portly stranger directed to Lord Chichester glances as ungracious as his own, immediately began to make the agreeable to him, with all the sociability inspired by a glass of excellent wine, and an antipathy in common.

Their familiarity progressed with the dinner. The elder gentleman seemed aware that his neighbour was a stranger in town; for he took the liberty of offering to facilitate his access to divers recondite public places, from the House of Lords down to the House of Correction. In return, John Evelyn was grateful and good humoured. His opinion of his neighbour waxed still higher when he saw that he stuck to the sirloin in preference to the dainty bits of French varnished leather, *à la* this and *à la*

that, successively brought round by the butler; and higher still, when, from London, their talk progressed to Cheshire; and it became clear to Evelyn that he was on intimate terms with many of the first people in the county. The stranger spoke of being there in six weeks, with what appeared so significant an emphasis, that Evelyn, though beginning to feel somewhat ashamed of the Willows and its garden gate, in addressing one who visited familiarly at Eaton and Combermere Abbey, mentioned in a slight way, that, should chance bring him to the neighbourhood, he had a preserve or two reserved for his friends, to which he should feel happy to introduce him.

What was his surprise and consternation when, in return for this little piece of gratuitous civility, the portly gentleman set down his glass of hock to reply, "And, believe me, it will afford me equal pleasure to see you at Grandison House. Hitherto my daughters have been too young to admit of my inviting

female guests; but I sincerely trust, that now Alicia is at the head of my house, Mrs. Evelyn will do us the honour to consider us within visiting distance."

It almost took away John Evelyn's breath to know that he had been offering his two turnip fields and a few osier beds and plantations, by way of preserves, to the proprietor of all the renowned battues at Grandison which had so often moved his envy. Lord Grandison—the Earl of Grandison—the Right Hon. Earl of Grandison—had actually been the object of his petty patronage! How thoughtless of Lady Gransden not to apprise him—not to present him in form. He might have inadvertently said a thousand things to insult Lord Grandison, and commit himself. As luck would have it, he had achieved the latter feat alone. He had only been a thousand times too civil to a man whom he had pledged himself to treat like a bear.

So exaggerated is the influence of the aristo-

cracy in England, or rather so servile the spirit of the middle classes, that a nobleman, in the vicinity of his country seat, as compared with the same man in his London club, is as the magnified flea in the plates of a treatise upon Entomology, compared with the same insect in its natural condition. The "Lord Anything," of an obscure country neighbourhood, is talked of by all its squires, as if there were something specific in the very hoofs of his coach-horses. To them he is a regal personage. They know the names and number of his servants—the arrangements of his household. On all occasions, they quote his sayings; and when he says nothing, wonder what he thinks; till reasonable beings visiting in the neighbourhood, become sick of his very name.

In this abject light had Lord Grandison always been regarded at the Willows. During the life of the late Lady Grandison, considerable festivities had occurred at Grandison House; and once a year the late Mr. and Mrs.

Evelyn had been invited. These visits had formed an epoch in the family history; had been talked of years and years afterwards; and it was a very serious mortification to John Evelyn, that, on his coming into possession of his small estate, no attempt was made by the Earl to extend his acquaintance with the family.

Evelyn had expected that, at some public meeting, the Earl, who lived forty miles distant from him, and who was unknown to him, even by sight, would request an introduction. He had expected it on coming of age—he had expected it at his marriage; but he had expected it in vain. The Earl evidently neither knew, nor cared anything about him. After a time, when the case grew hopeless, the grapes became sour. John Evelyn assured his wife it was a decided lucky thing for them they were spared the expense of post-horses for such remote visiting as Grandison House; and became just as fond of raking up ill-natured

stories against the Earl, as he had been of singing his praises, so long as he expected a visit. At length, he went so far as to declare to Lady Seldon and others of his neighbours, that it might be very well for them to listen to the indecent sallies of such a reprobate as the Earl of Grandison ; but that, for his part, he thought venison and Champagne a very poor compensation for being compelled to witness incessant outrages of decorum ; and that nothing on earth would induce him to take *his* wife to Grandison House.

All poor Mrs. Evelyn's silly vauntings about her sister Lady Gransden, were attributable to the same cause. Smarting under her mortification, she loved to remind the country neighbours, who, she was convinced, despised her because she did not visit at Grandison, that, though despised by an Earl, she had a sister a Viscountess ; and Lord Grandison was consequently the remote and innocent cause of all the vengeance vowed against poor Laura by the

fair Meltonians, as well as of the hatred cherished against her by Lady Seldon, who had never beheld her in her life.

And after all this,—after swearing that should his Lordship *now* even request an introduction, he would refuse—refuse in the most pointed, the most uncivil manner—to go and offer him a day's shooting—to talk to him of his preserves;—to invite him, in the most petitioning tone, to the Willows;—to speak of showing him something of the county—showing *him* who possessed a rent-roll there of five-and-forty thousand a year! Poor Evelyn, exaggerating the importance of the Earl and everything that concerned him, felt ready to sink into the earth.

The thing that surprised him, next to his own stupidity in not making the discovery before, was the extreme familiarity between his sister-in-law and the Earl and his daughter. He was pretty nearly sure that Lady Gransden had stated, when they were altogether at Han-

bury Park the preceding year, that she did not so much as know Lord Grandison by sight. Was it possible that an acquaintance so quickly formed had so rapidly ripened into familiarity? Was such the effect of the forcing house called London—the hot bed of fashionable society? If so, perhaps the good-looking fellow opposite, with his white teeth and quotations from Lycophron, had needed only a few months to achieve the fatal progress there was every appearance that he had made in the affections of Lord Gransden's wife!

## CHAPTER IX.

A general representation of an action, either ridiculous or enormous, will make those wince who find too much similitude to themselves to plead not guilty.

ADDISON.

IT was wonderful that the Dowager should have found strength to stand so long watching behind the crimson curtain the arrival of Lord Gransden's company and ice-pails ; for she had gone through a world of fatigue that morning—driving from house to house, like an errand-man labouring in his vocation, to deposit all her little parcels of inuendoes and packets of fibs.

Busy days of this description, were, however, the delight of her life. To Lady Delmaine, to develope some tit bit of scandal, was like to lettered persons reading some charming romance or epic poem. She was overjoyed, after wasting her time in beating the bushes, to start unexpectedly a piece of game ; and so long as there remained the slightest scent in the wind, seldom abandoned her hopes of bringing it down, and bagging it for home consumption.

It was incredible the number of persons whose minds she had contrived to poison in the course of the day in question. "Well," said she in the first house she entered, "as I predicted long ago, things are coming to a crisis with the Gransdens. The catastrophe is at hand !"

"Indeed ?—an execution in the house ? I hadn't an idea they were hard up !"

"I don't refer to money-matters. I know nothing about their finances, though I dare

say they are going as ill as all the rest. When the general break up of a family takes place, it is generally seen, that while the lady was following her pastimes, the servants were following theirs."

"But what pastimes has Lady Gransden been following? She always seemed to me a very charming woman; and certainly not the least of a flirt."

"Not the least of a flirt? You give that as your conscientious opinion? Come, come, I see you are cautious; but caution is useless now. The whole thing is discovered. Her family and the lawyers have been called in."

"The lawyers called in? *The lawyers?* God bless my soul, my dear Lady Delmaine, *do* tell me all about it!—When did this happen?"

"I would tell you all I know with pleasure, but I have an appointment with my daughter Langley, which it is out of my power to break."

Good morning, good morning." And away she flew, leaving, like a wasp, her sting behind.

"Charmingly your friend Lady Gransden has managed her affairs!"—was the opening phrase in another house. "I always thought she would not get clear through another season! Fortunate that she has no children; perhaps, however, if she had been a mother, she might have found better occupation for her time."

"Better than what?"

"Oh! my dear Lady Sophia, you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Indeed I don't. I know nothing wrong of Lady Gransden. She never plays—never bets—as when my back is turned you accuse *me* of doing. Don't apologize!—in my case, you only tell truth. But I positively never could persuade Lady Gransden to stake a sovereign."

“Play is a shocking vice!” said the Dowager, sententiously; “but it is not the only one in the world.”

“Does Lady Gransden drink, then?” cried Lady Sophia, laughing, “for gallantry is fortunately out of the question with a woman so desperately fond of her husband, that she has been ready to kill Lady Medwyn for only wanting to make a tory of him.”

“That is all *you* know of the matter! However, it is not for me to circulate the thing. It will soon speak for itself! I am sure I am heartily sorry to see a young person so throw herself away! However, her father is come up to act as her friend, and will take care that her worldly interests are cared for.”

“Her father?—Her interests? Now do, my dear Lady Delmaine, tell me all about it. Lady Gransden get into a scrape! Lady Gransden, who pretended in *our* case, to be so scandalized at what was no scrape at all, but only the *manière d’être* of a society to which

she was unaccustomed. What has she been doing? And what is going to be done with her?"

"Pray excuse me! I wish to be the last person to give publicity to a story so odious. Good morning. The Sunday papers will tell you the rest."

To certain of the "scribes and pharisees, hypocrites," her scandals were more plausibly enveloped.

"Ah! my dear Lady Charlotte! Who would have thought it? But God's will be done! Poor dear Lord Gransden! Ah! as I was saying to my daughter yesterday, if Lady Gransden had only our friend Lady Charlotte's refined mind and admirable principles, her elegant occupations, and exemplary piety! I suppose you heard last night at Almacks that the affair was in the lawyer's hands?"

"What affair? I am quite *tombée des nues*. I live so thoroughly apart from the gay scenes of the world!—*My* happiness, by the Lord's

mercy, is fixed in a higher sphere ! I didn't go to Almacks last night, because Dévy hadn't sent home my turban, and one looks such a wretch in a blonde cap at this time of year. Tell me, my dear friend !—To what dreadful act of culpability are you alluding ? You know that I am a mere novice—a mere *child* !”

“Well, I am sure, *I* thought you were on the point of becoming a great grandmother !” said the Dowager, drawing in her lips.

“I spoke in a moral sense. The mind has neither sex nor age. The goodness of the Almighty has decreed, that a perpetual spring should rejuvenate the spirits of those who put their trust in his promises. Pray will there be a divorce ?”

“I am no lawyer.”

“Nor I a divine ; yet I can understand the heinousness of the case, as you might understand the law of it.”

“All I can tell you is, that I should be very sorry to have a daughter of mine, or I may

add grand-daughter, (for I am not ashamed of having a grand-daughter,) stand in such a predicament."

"Things are proceeding then to extremities? Well, I never should have thought it. One certainly ought to feel no unchristianly exultation in the fall of a neighbour,—a frail young woman, too; yet, I must confess, it gives me pleasure when I see a hypocrite unmasked."

"Ah! one never knows when one's own turn may come!"—said the Dowager, forgetting as she turned up her eyes, that it was not a decease they were deploring. "But rely upon it, my dear Lady Charlotte, should anything *decisive* transpire concerning, this disgusting affair, I will instantly hasten to inform you."

In other places, the Dowager spoke more cavalierly.

"Well, Lady Dearmouth!—No mistake! The Gransden affair is thoroughly blown."

"Blown to what?"

“To all the corners of London—or soon will be. Who was right, you or I? I offered to bet you a guinea, you know, at your last loo-party, that Lady Gransden would not be in Grosvenor Street next year.”

“And you know I refused your bet, being quite sure that your espionage would end with driving her out of the neighbourhood.”

“What do you mean by espionage? I can’t help seeing with my eyes.”

“No, nor talking with your tongue. Why can’t you let the girl alone? She was going down hill fast enough, my dear soul, without any assistance of yours. What made you go and tell a long rigmarole story about her the other day to Mrs. Crouch, when you had been sitting half an hour with *me* without saying a word about the matter? Surely I am as much to be trusted as Mrs. Crouch. You and I have been acquainted ever since we were born—three score years or thereabouts. I remember when we used to dance minuets in

red morocco shoes at Panthémont, previous to the French Revolution. And after that, to go and give your preference, as a confidante, to Mrs. Crouch, to whom you were only introduced eighteen years ago at Cheltenham! A mere watering-place acquaintance! I confess, Lady Delmaine, I reckoned more upon your friendship."

"I plead guilty, my dear Lady Dearmouth. The truth is, I had been most particularly pledged to secrecy respecting the affair in question. Only, as I need not tell you, Mrs. Crouch has such an insidious way of worming things out of one. That woman's tongue would coax a guinea out of a miser's strong box. However, I have not said a word to her of my *new* discovery. You have the *étrennes* of the story. Yes, as I was telling you, there has been a regular explosion between the Viscount and his wife. Her parents were sent for to take her home. The mother would not come; but at day-break this morning, the

poor distracted father and his man of business, made their appearance."

"Well, and what is the result?"

"At present, nobody knows. The thing was carried on, as the newspapers say, with closed doors. Strangers were ordered to leave the gallery."

"But it wasn't carried on with closed windows, I suppose; and you weren't ordered to withdraw from your own drawing-room, eh? Thanks to the number of looking-glasses in the Gransdens' front room, one sees every thing that passes there, from your work-table, as plain as if it were under the same roof. Come, come, my dear soul, don't make mysteries of nothing. You know very well that—"

"Hush! not so loud. I'm sure I heard Lord Dearmouth in the other room; and you know what a fuss he makes when he finds us engaged in what he calls a privy council of scandal."

“Pho, pho!—Lord Dearmouth has been down at Boodle’s this hour past. Well, how did the country squire receive the intelligence? With half the emotion, I will answer for it, that he would have heard of one of his train-horses being attacked with the staggers! Ay, ay, he has got his deserts! The gentleman was ambitious. He chose to make his daughter a Viscountess, instead of marrying her in her own sphere of life, to some neighbouring squire; *et il est puni par où il a péché!* I wonder what the damages will be laid at?”

“Hush, hush! my dear Lady Dearmouth. I can *assure* you, I have heard Lord Dearmouth stirring in the other room.”

“Nonsense! When he *is* there, he never stirs. Lord Dearmouth’s as still as a mouse. If there’s any one there, ’tis my prying second footman, who is a literary gentleman, and had some hand, I believe, in that abominable Diary. Do just open the door and see.”

“Not a soul! Well I could have sworn I

heard some one moving. I dare say it was a mouse, which you are pleased to call *still*, but which is the noisiest little beast in creation."

"By the way, I call that Mr. Harvey d'Ewes, (that saucy protégé of Lady Mary Langley's) the noisiest little beast in creation. Our whist-party at the Maxwell's, last night, broke up an hour earlier than usual, because Mr. d'Ewes and Miss Langley were in such high spirits and talked so loud, that there was no knowing one card from another."

"Cecilia talk loud? Why she is the dullest, quietest girl in London."

"You wouldn't have thought so if you had heard her last night. I am sure, I trust her mother gave her a severe reprimand when they got home. Mrs. Crouch kept turning round and giving her such looks—(you know how she can look from under that bright green turban, which gives her just the air of Friar Bacon's brazen head, patched with verdigris.) Even Lord Chichester, who stood in the door-

way, not choosing to come in for fear of interrupting the players, looked perfectly astonished at her."

"Is that Mr. d'Ewes anything of a match?" inquired the Dowager, closing her left eye, and peering cunningly out of the other.

"I should think not. Young men of fortune seldom give themselves the trouble to be so vastly entertaining. Mr. d'Ewes tells good stories, and draws caricatures upon ladies' fans; a country-house-man—a mister merryman, who makes his appearance at Christmas with the turkey and mistletoe."

"Just what I should have expected of Cissy Langley! That girl has no more taste—no more foresight, than an owl. If she must giggle and flirt, why not make herself talked of with some man likely to do her credit? I shall speak to her mother about it. Lady Mary takes things much too easily. It is no thanks to her, I can tell you, that her son Augustus is not in the Gransden scrape instead

of his cousin ; for she was always encouraging him to go to the house, on the plea that good female society is the best school in the world for a young man of his age. Very good society forsooth ! All I know is, that if Augustus Langley were, at this moment, standing in the shoes of Lord Chichester, as he is always ambitious of doing, I would not answer for the consequences to his father. I am certain it would break poor Morison Langley's heart."

" Lady Mary's, let us hope, is more tough ; for this Gransden business, I suspect, will put her out a little in her plans. In the first place, she loses Lord Chichester for her daughter."

" How can she lose what never belonged to her ? Chichester never had the least thoughts of Cissy Langley. His mother and sister take too good care of him ; and his father intends him to bring the Wilsmere estates into the family."

" There again !—another blow for Lady Mary ! We all know that she wanted the

heiress for her son. We all saw how she snapped Lady Alicia de Wendover up, before the poor girl had time to look about her. However, Lord Grandison soon discerned what was going on, and moved her off safe under the wing of Lady Gransden, who has neither son nor brother. And now see the result :— all the world has seen this poor girl, morning, noon and night, in company with Lady Gransden and Lord Chichester ; so that she must have seen and understood what was going on. After which, I should imagine, the prudish Lady Mary Langley would scarcely compromise with having her for a daughter-in-law.”

“ Depend on it, Lord Grandison means Lady Alicia de Wendover to fly at higher game than the son of a commoner in leather gaiters, and of moderate fortune. Well, we shall see who will have the courage to take her out of the Gransden school ! When the exposé in that nouse takes place, (if, indeed, the business should come into court, and afterwards, worse

still, before those gentlemen of the red robe, who are so much nastier in their cross-examination of such sad affairs than those of the long robe) things will come out—perhaps in mitigation of damages, (I use the word advisedly, but I beg you will not commit me on the subject, my dear Lady Dearmouth)—I only say things will come out—which—perhaps it is better to say no more about. There are political intrigues connected with the affair, which might—in short, I prefer washing my hands of it!”

“Yes—as Pilate did before he proceeded to sentence of execution,” cried Lady Dearmouth, whose sarcasms spared neither friend nor foe. “But the mischief is done now, I can tell you. You hinted something or other to that chattering ape, Sir Jacob Appleby, which he has, what he calls, allowed to escape him at his club. Escape him, indeed!—just as the gas escapes in the Grotto del Cane, which murders poor animals by the dozen a day! Now, for

my part, I make it a point of conscience, where an unpleasant circumstance, involving the peace of a family reaches my ear, either to keep it sacred within my own bosom, or mention it only in the strictest confidence to a bosom friend—such, my dear madam, as yourself. I should never forgive myself, were I to find that any inadvertent remark of mine had been the means of consigning a fellow creature to the miseries of a wounded reputation. Reputation, my dear Lady Delmaine, is—but I need not tell you what reputation is! We have all seen it torn to rags, and ground to atoms often enough, to be tolerably well acquainted with its composition. But I am sure you will agree with me, that one cannot be too careful about putting into circulation rumours of a defamatory nature. Remember Holloway and Haggerty! Holloway and Haggerty, as your Ladyship knows, after being convicted upon circumstantial evidence, and hanged for murder, were proved innocent as babes un-

born. A sad example! Whenever I find myself on the point, upon the evidence of others, of pronouncing severe sentence, I bring to mind the fate of Holloway and Haggerty."

"Now, my dear Lady Dearmouth—"

"A carriage—ah! Sir Lucius Flimsy, I declare! Quite well, thank you—passed a much better night;—but you were quite right to look in. Pray have you heard this abominable affair of Lady Gransden's?—quite a case of scan. mag.! They say it will be impossible for Lord Gransden to get a divorce, on account of the extreme carelessness of his conduct with regard to his wife."

"Now, my dear Lady Dearmouth," cried the Dowager, again trying to interrupt her.

"They say it can be proved that he actually threw her in Lord Chichester's way; and though she has committed herself since in more instances than one, Lord Chichester, you know, was certainly the first. But I fancy it

is not yet decided against which of them the action is to be brought."

"Now, my dear Lady Dearmouth!" persisted the Dowager, "you know very well that—"

"Lady Delmaine don't like to have it talked of in her presence, because her relationship to the hero of the affair places her in a position of some delicacy," resumed Lady Dearmouth, in an audible aside. "Of course, you know, if it were any common case—any case that could be hushed up by money, the Delmaines would be wise enough to go to any expense to procure a compromise; for it will not only ruin the young man's character—(the wife of his bosom friend, you know : even in these times, the world is not easily persuaded to wink at the seduction of the wife of a bosom friend !)—but will lose him his seat, and the hand of the heiress, Lady Alicia de Wendover. To be sure, Lord Chichester has made vast sacrifices

for this silly young woman ; and now you will see, the moment he gets her upon his hands, he will try to throw her off ! For my part, I doubt whether Lord Gransden will be able to get rid of her sufficiently to admit of his marrying again ; however, it can be proved that one of Lady Gransden's—friends, I suppose I must call them—was actually concealed in his house. Lady Delmaine there can testify to the truth of that report, because it happens that her own maid is sister to one of Lord Gransden's confidential servants, who made the disclosure."

"Now, my dear Lady Dearmouth !" cried the Dowager, speaking at the same moment, "it was only my housemaid, who was sister to Lord Gransden's groom ; and the man is at this moment—"

"In her servants' hall," continued Lady Dearmouth, concluding her sentence.

"In Bloomsbury Square," persisted the Dowager, in a higher key.

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"In Bloomsbury Square," persisted the Dowager, in a higher key.

## CHAPTER X.

She did love him less  
As lover of her younger days, and friend  
Of years mature, than as the patriot sage  
Of valour stern and honesty, whose voice  
Was ever firm amid the shiftiest times,  
Whose every word and action proved his worth,  
His christian courage and his patriot soul  
Of stoic temper; one whose virtues breathed  
Fragrance and balm amid the scenes of fraud,  
Apostacy, and crime that soil the age,  
As violets shed their perfume, prevalent  
O'er all the poisons that go rankly by.

ANON.

TWICE had Lady Mary Langley made her way into her husband's morning room, to confide to him the state of her perplexities concerning their beloved daughter; but, on both occasions, she had been forced to wait the exit

of one of his political colleagues, ere she could effect an entrance. The first time, it was one of the ministers who sat there, closeted with the county member, upon whose parliamentary influence government relied as among one of its most efficient props ; the second, it was a leading member of the House of Peers, who might have been a member of the administration fifty times over, had he chosen to take upon himself for hire the public duties to which he conscientiously devoted himself as an hereditary legislator of the realm.

Such a moment, she felt, was unpropitious to the nature of the interview she meditated. Morison Langley was a man who, when he threw aside the toga of public life, threw it off completely ; and from the grave patriot became at once the simple friend, the affectionate husband and parent. But he wore it with more endearing patience in private life than most of his colleagues. Nearly the whole of his London mornings were given to business.

The affairs of a populous shire weighed heavily upon his leisure; to say nothing of the load of gratuitous business which his high character, as a parliamentary authority, brought upon his shoulders. He was consulted by the ignorant, he was consulted by the hesitating. So long as they chose to appeal, in friendship's name, to the wisdom of the oracle, his study door was accessible; and while these consultations were going on, he was not pleased to be broken in upon with the petty details of domestic life.

It required the judgment of so sound a head as Lady Mary's to decide to what extent his privacy was to be respected. During the boyhood of her son, she had sometimes felt mortified at perceiving that Morison Langley was more interested in his county business, than in the task of correcting the youthful impetuosity of one who was to be his successor in public life, as well as his stay and comfort in private. And it was, perhaps, to avoid all possibility of

a similar vexation regarding her daughter, that Lady Mary had always scrupulously avoided intruding upon his notice any trivial anxieties relating to her daughter.

But in this calculation, she was mistaken. Morison Langley considered his boy's youthful escapades as the affair of the tutors, of whom he had entertained a sufficiently high opinion to entrust them with his education. But for his daughter—his only daughter—his lovely, sweet, affectionate Cecilia, he entertained a sensitive and chivalrous fondness, which seemed to constitute her happiness and honour—a sort of sacred deposit entrusted to his keeping. It will often be seen, that just as a high-minded mother takes pride in her son, a high-minded father takes delight in his daughter ; and Virginius and Cornelia could scarcely have exchanged the objects of their parental love, without a diminution of its intensity.

Of all this, Lady Mary was unaware ; for she bore her own faculties as meekly, or rather, as

unconsciously, as the horse its courage, or the lion its strength; and as regarded the virtues of her husband, with the common weakness of her sex, she revered him more in his public capacities, than as the loving father or agreeable companion. She shrunk, therefore, from appealing to his sympathies in behalf of Cecilia's delicate distresses, while his mind was still harassed with the despondencies of the Right Hon. Sec., who had been unburthening his budget of governmental difficulties;—or the exultation of the Right Hon. Earl, who had been boasting of stones thrown under the wheels of the administration, regardless of the danger of impeding the progress of a vehicle essential to the public service, until a safer one was in readiness to supply its place. Twice, therefore, did she turn the motive of her visit to a less interesting origin; and show herself ready to listen to all he chose to communicate of the cares that made him thoughtful, or the apprehensions that made him sad.

At all times a ready and judicious listener, she was not the less zealously devoted as a wife, because indulging the anxieties of a mother.

The third time, however, she came determined to speak and to be heard; for Langley was alone, and the recent scene at Roehampton had determined her upon taking active steps with regard to the visits of Lord Chichester in Eaton Square.

But though alone, he was in company with those busy faculties—his thoughts; and, consequently, far more absorbed than when checking, by a grave look, the exultation of a factious peer, or encouraging, by a smile, the despair of an over-badgered ministerial adjutant.

Upon the wall, sketched in all its prodigious extent of consequence and consequences, hung a huge map of the shire it was his onerous happiness to represent in parliament—the many-leaved register of his toils and troubles; and as Lady Mary perceived, on entering, that

her husband's eye was riveted thereupon, albeit, as familiar with its unshapely outline as with that of his own hand, she trembled lest a third time her maternal anxieties were to yield to the stress of the county member's public responsibilities. She was afraid there was some new railroad, some new mining company working in his brain.

"I fear I disturb you," said she, traversing the apartment with her usual noiseless tread—an habitual glide acquired by years of copartnership with a man of business, as that of a noble English diplomatist is said to be attributable to his long mission at Vienna, and creeping away unnoticed from its scientific music parties.

"You never disturb me—you are always welcome!" was his cordial reply; "for you not only come to lighten my cares, but to leave me something agreeable in place of those you take away."

Lady Mary shook her head, intending to

prepare his mind by a gesture conveying that her present purpose was far from agreeable ; but Morison Langley, too pre-occupied by his own worries to notice the expression of his wife's countenance, went on :

“ I have had half a dozen annoying country letters this morning,” said he. “ In the first place, from that excellent fellow, Burnaby, who tells me, I have no chance, at present, of my last year's rents, without the exercise of more harshness than, I trust, will ever be practised by an agent of mine. I wrote to him last week rather pressingly on the subject, mentioning that money would soon be wanting for our season's expenses ; and, in his reply, he has adverted—delicately, but strongly—to the assurance he gave me, before we quitted Langley, of the improbability that these tenants of mine would be in a situation to book up any part of their arrears before harvest, and the consequent necessity for economy.”

“Mr. Burnaby had every right to make such a representation,” observed Lady Mary. “Aware of your immense expenses at Langley, as representative of the county, he also knows that, till Lady Conyngsby’s death, we must remain in straitened circumstances ; and I therefore took it very well of him that, previous to our departure for town, he saw fit to remind us of what is far more frequently brought under his observation than our own. But for Burnaby’s hint, I might have been tempted to give a ball in honour of Cissy’s coming out ; and your distressed tenants would certainly have felt it hard to be pressed for their arrears, while they knew that we could afford the waste of costly entertainments.”

“Prudent, however, as you have been on this point and many others regarding our common expenditure, some person has been ill-natured enough to supply information respecting us to our county opposition paper ; and there have been a series of paragraphs exag-

gerating all our proceedings in town, as contrasted with the amount of my donations to the county charities. Burnaby's letter incloses me an abstract of the last of these, describing our new carriage as fit only for a Lord Mayor's show, and adverting to our box at the Opera. Immediately afterwards, as if in deduction from these miserable details, follows an account of the attempts made by Burnaby to screw out of our unfortunate tenants the means of maintaining our London follies !”

“ Shameful !” burst from the indignant lips of Lady Mary, on noticing the manifest vexation of her husband.

“ Now how could it possibly transpire,” resumed Mr. Langley, “ that Burnaby had been making any effort in our affairs ? I did not mention, even to Augustus, that I was in want of money.”

“ You mentioned it to *me* ; and I, as you may imagine, had no inclination to repeat it to any other person. Except, indeed,” continued

Lady Mary, correcting herself, “a slight hint to my sister, when she wanted Augustus to subscribe largely, in addition to your subscription, to the Wellington and Nelson monuments; and I observed, that while Burnaby gave such bad accounts of our prospects, I could not encourage my son to indulge his inclinations at the expense of common prudence.”

“*That*, then, was the channel through which the information reached the north!” observed Morison Langley. “Lady Meliora’s friend, Sir Jacob Appleby, is brother to the leading attorney of the tory interest in ——shire; and I have often been able to trace malicious rumours involving me and my family, to the gossiping of Grosvenor Street.”

“I must put my sister on her guard,” said Lady Mary. “With *her*, I thought myself so safe as not even to use the usual precaution of requesting secrecy.”

“Instead of putting her on her guard, don’t trust her again,” said Langley. “One always

errs, I fancy, in letting one's right hand know what one's left doeth, in regard to money matters. It is an indecent thing to talk to *any one* of pecuniary affairs ; and we require to be punished now and then, by way of reminder against the fault."

" I grieve, however, that for an error of mine the punishment should fall on *you*."

" Never mind," replied Morison Langley, with an affectionate smile. " I so often reap the reward of your virtues, that it is fit I should pay the penalty of your occasional mistakes ; but I suspect I shall not be ruined by the mulct. The fact is, that nothing taxes one's prudence more than the choice of confidants. It is so difficult to discriminate friend from foe ! Those Threlkelds—the Mayor and his wife, I mean—you know how uniformly civil—how more than civil we have been to them—how regularly they have been invited to Langley—conciliated with gifts of venison, game, and fruit ; and even the other day, when they

were in town, though at a moment when your engagements made it particularly inconvenient, consider how attentive you were to Mrs. Threlkeld and her daughters.”

“Cecilia and I did our best. They had the Opera-box one of the fullest Saturdays of the season; they dined here—they—”

“I know, I know. I remember admiring your patience with that impracticable woman, and Cissy’s good nature to those heavy girls. Yet, will you believe it?—They went back into——shire complaining of our neglect and incivility.”

“My conscience acquits me,” said Lady Mary, with a smile. “I studied to the utmost how to oblige them.”

“Harrington told me last night at the House, (by the way, Harrington is up before a committee, and will be in town these ten days, pray remind me to ask him to dinner), Harrington assured me Threlkeld is so furious against us, that he is afraid I should

find him very troublesome in the event of a general election. Threlkeld, you know, as well as twenty others whom I could name, always takes to himself the merit of my election ; and, to do him justice, for the last twenty years, I have not had a more active or more disinterested supporter in the county. But then, I *have* done him justice. I have always acknowledged my obligation. I have always been prompt to testify my gratitude. And now, the fellow, Heaven knows why, has turned against me, and is doing me every injury in his power !”

“Again, alas ! I must plead guilty !” said Lady Mary. “The Threlkelds were wild upon getting a *protégée* of theirs (the child of an old servant), into the Blind Asylum ; and, in spite of all my efforts to serve them, we did not succeed.”

“Since you admit so much,” replied Langley, good-humouredly, “I may as well tell you what I did not intend you to know, that Har-

rington accuses you as the origin of the mischief. You know his enthusiastic devotion to us ; and will, therefore, understand the indignation with which he relates that Mrs. Threlkeld goes about abusing you in all directions, as having been convicted by your own sister, before her face, of being too fine to exert yourself for this unfortunate Sarah Smith, who is said to have lost her election entirely through your supineness."

"What mischiefs arise from unguarded assertions!" cried Lady Mary. "Meliora met the Mayor's wife and daughters here, and certainly said something in their presence, nearly to the effect of the scandal they have promulgated. But I hope in Heaven, Threlkeld will not be able to do you any serious injury?"

"He might annoy me to a great extent; and, to own the truth, it already vexes me more than I can describe, to be obliged to regard as an enemy one who for such a lapse of years, has acted as a friend. I have real obli-

gations to Threlkeld, and cannot bear to think of him as a foe."

"But if I were to write a short letter of explanation to Mr. Threlkeld?"

"Not for the world! I would lose my election (which is not likely), sooner than that my wife should condescend to anything in the slightest degree derogatory. No, no—let us leave the Threlkelds alone, and they will come to their senses. Our conscience acquits us of ingratitude towards them, and that is enough. Besides, I find from another of my correspondents, that I have further grievances in——shire; more waters of strife to fish in!"

"Waters of strife?—*you*!" cried Lady Mary, shrugging her shoulders, in impatience of the injustice of this world.

"I need not tell you how I exerted myself about Chichester's election; in the first place, in compliment to the name he bears; in the second, because there is something in that young fellow which excites my highest expect-

tations. In supporting him, I acted as I would wish some other honest man to act towards Augustus Langley. For his father, I would not willingly stir my little finger ; but for Chichester, I was willing to break through my determination of never giving pledges for the political conduct of any living man."

The word "political" came as a saving grace to Lady Mary's terrors. She had been afraid that this preamble bore some reference to Lord Chichester's private proceedings. "I trust," said she, striving to look unconcerned, "that our young friend has not disappointed your expectations?"

"By no means. Chichester makes a capital member. All that has been required of him, he has done excellently well. On all occasions, he has voted up to his pledges to his constituents—up to the principles of his party ; I see no fault to be found with him. Yet some cursed mischief-maker or other—Sir Jacob Appleby again, I suspect—has been de-

nouncing him as on the point of ratting—as bound hand and foot to the tories, and only awaiting some popular question to secede from us! His connection with the Gransdens and their clique has been pointed out as the root of the evil; and from all I have heard hazarded on that subject in Grosvenor Street, I am convinced that the Dowager's representations have been the means of circulating this injurious report."

"I fear I cannot defend my mother," said Lady Mary, with a heavy sigh. "She is so unguarded in her observations! Without intending injury to either Chichester or you, I think it likely she may have originated the rumour."

Involuntarily Mr. Langley struck an impatient blow on the table beside which he was seated. "If women could but conjecture the disastrous results of their prating!" cried he. "If Lady Delmaine could but imagine all the

mischiefs that have issued from her Pandora's box in Grosvenor Street! I am convinced that, were the catalogue arrayed in black and white before her, she would shudder at the recapitulation."

Lady Mary answered not a word. She had latterly ceased to hope that any earthly circumstance would soften the heart of the Dowager.

"Is Chichester aware," said she, "of the misrepresentation of which he has been the subject? Have you acquainted him with what has passed?"

"No. I was thinking of bringing him home from Brookes's to dine with us to-day," replied Mr. Langley; "and as we proceed together afterwards to the House, I will throw myself on his candour. I had rather not speak to him before Augustus. I am as little satisfied with my son's manner towards his cousin, as with his assiduities in Grosvenor Street."

“You are mistaken. Augustus hardly ever sets foot in my mother’s house,” cried Lady Mary.

“I was not alluding to the Dowager, but to Lady Gransden,” observed Langley, too straight forward to surmise that his wife was guilty of an intentional blunder in order to screen her son, as Lord Delmaine under similar circumstances, would instantly have inferred.

“I can assure you, that he is no admirer of Lady Gransden,” said Lady Mary.

“I am quite of your way of thinking; and should have almost more patience with him for throwing away his time upon a woman he really preferred—though the preference itself were blamable—than for the trivial perversity of trying to supplant another. Augustus’s object is merely to become the rival of Chichester.”

“I am certain that Lord Chichester’s liking for Lady Gransden is quite as harmless as

that of my son," persisted Lady Mary. "Nay, I entertain suspicions concerning the real bent of Chichester's inclinations, which dispose me to ask you, as a favour, not to bring him home with you to dinner, either to-day or on any future occasion."

"What do you mean?" cried Langley, his cheek suddenly flushing.

"I mean, that your daughter's happiness may be endangered if you throw her too freely into the company of this young man."

"You mean more, I am convinced, from the constrained tone of your voice," cried Morison Langley. "Your manner is not natural. You do not look me in the face. You are afraid to be too explicit. My dear wife, I conjure you, speak out! You know not what terrors your mysterious hint has already conjured up. Tell me—do my fears outstrip the truth? Has anything, unknown to us, been going on between Chichester and Cecilia?"

“Nothing but what might have been known to us, if we had chosen to open our eyes and exert our understandings. The two young people have, I fear, become over sensitive to each other’s merits.”

“In plain English, they have fallen in love ! Ass that I was not to foresee this ! I ought to have known it—I ought to have guessed it. It is according to the invariable course of such matters ; for Chichester is, perhaps, of all the young fellows in London, the last I desire for a son-in-law !”

“And why, pray ?” cried Lady Mary, blushing in her turn. “It is surely impossible to see a more charming young man. Our partiality for Cis ought not to render us unjust towards Chichester.”

“Nor does it. I haven’t a word to say against him. I like him—I admire him—I approve him—but I don’t want him to marry my daughter. I do not wish Lord Delmaine

to become Cecilia's father-in-law, nor Lady Delmaine to drive her into the sin of disrespecting her husband's mother."

"On that score, you have little to apprehend," replied Lady Mary. "Lord Delmaine, I fear, shares your antipathies. Nothing, I am convinced, would annoy him more than the idea of his son allying himself with one having neither rank nor fortune to repay the honour of the concession."

"You don't mean to say that Lord Delmaine has either shown or prompted any slight towards yourself or Cecilia?"

"None, whatever, I assure you," replied Lady Mary, almost inclined to smile at the vehemence of his tone. "But I noted the expression of his countenance at the Roehampton archery-meeting; and am certain his son is aware that he would have no chance of his father's consent to his addresses to Cecilia, were he disposed to pay them."

“You did not, I trust, form that conclusion from Chichester’s withdrawing from Cis, in the presence of his father, any attentions he may be in the habit of showing her elsewhere?”

“No, no—once more, compose yourself,” cried Lady Mary, laying her hand persuasively upon his arm, “or I shall begin to think that I am talking to my petulant son, instead of to the sober man of three score and five. As far as regards Chichester, his conduct is perfect; but I am as little inclined to have him constantly in the house, to the danger of Cecilia’s heart and happiness, as you can be to see her charming nature run the risk of contamination from the constant society of such people as Lady Charlotte Chichester and her mother.”

“Cecilia’s happiness? You don’t surely consider her affections are seriously entangled?”

“Let us hope that the affections of eighteen are never *very* seriously entangled; but I do

not desire her to run further risks. I wish the thing to be checked at once."

"I will speak to Chichester this very day," cried Morison Langley.

"Speak to him?—Not for worlds!" exclaimed Lady Mary. "You surely would not so commit your daughter! Reflect, that he has made no sort of declaration."

"Then why has he not—since you say that his attentions have been such as to entangle the affections of my poor dear girl?"

"His attentions have been only those of a near relative and early friend. In my heart of hearts, I believe him to be attached to her; but were he, from this day forth, to make no further advances, none of us has a right to accuse him of having misled her expectations."

"There must be blame somewhere, I fear," resumed Langley, looking deeply vexed. "Either Chichester has been practising on Cissy's feelings, or Cissy has allowed her affec-

tions to run riot on too slight encouragement."

"I will not have you say *that*!" cried Lady Mary, indignant in her turn. "There *is* blame somewhere; but it is with *us*—solely with us; and though we have made the discovery somewhat late, that young people may be too much thrown in each other's way, we owe it to our child, and we owe it to ourselves, to be discreet in the reparation of our fault. Say not a syllable to Chichester, but become less cordial in your invitations; and should he hazard an inquiry as to why we are less hospitable than formerly, say frankly, that *I* am of opinion Lord Delmaine disapproves his intimacy at the house. From his reply, you will judge in a moment whether his feelings for our girl are more than mere cousinly regard; and it will then be time enough for you to express, both to him and to Cecilia, your objections."

All this was wormwood to poor Langley. To have but one daughter, "passing fair," and

her so towardly and dutiful, and yet be menaced with the domestic misery arising from a disappointment of the affections, was indeed a cross in his destiny ! He had anticipated thwartings from Augustus ; but from Cecilia—from his gentle, kind, submissive Cecilia, he had expected nothing but sunshine. Her love affairs, like everything else connected with her, ought to have been fair as ivory and smooth as glass !

And then, as regarded Lord Delmaine, Langley had always maintained towards his wife's kinsman so independent an attitude—had borne himself so proudly, so nobly towards Chichester Court !—And now for the Earl to be warranted in saying, that the Langleys were ambitious of his alliance—nay, perhaps, that they had been attempting to entrap his son !—perhaps, that all those courtesies towards Lord Chichester, which were purely personal, purely caused by political views arising out of private predilections, were well calculated springs, in-

tended from the first to “catch him” as a husband for Miss Langley!

It was mortifying beyond description! The——shire Courant, with its account of his spendthrift habits, and his agent’s extortions—the worshipful Mayor, with his petty spleens and pretended championship of Sarah Smith—even Lord Chichester’s imputed forfeiture of his electioneering pledges was as nothing compared with the apprehension of seeing unhappy love, “like a worm i’ the bud,” feed on Cecilia’s “damask cheek;” and hearing it reported by the Dowager that he and Lady Mary had been making up for their daughter to the son and heir of the Earl of Delmaine, whose foresight had rescued the young gentleman from so imprudent a connexion!

“I would give worlds that nothing of this had chanced,” said he, as Lady Mary attempted to tranquillize his mind. “My besetting sin—I need not own it to my wife—is pride; and admire how heavily it is visited!

My chief anxiety about Augustus's assiduities to Lady Gransden, arose from the fact of Lady Alicia de Wendover being her constant companion. I dreaded lest the world should think that the son of a poor commoner was making up to a rich heiress! But what was that, where a high spirited fellow like Grandison was concerned—Grandison who never yet placed an unhandsome construction upon the feelings of a friend—compared with the humiliation of having it insinuated that we tried to hook the son of such a thing as the Earl of Delmaine; but that, apprized in time, the family circumvented our projects!"

## CHAPTER XI.

Imperfect mischief !

Thou, like an adder, venomous and deaf,  
Hast stung the traveller, yet after hear'st  
Not his pursuing voice. E'en when thou thinkst  
To hide, the rustling leaves and bended grass  
Confess, and point the path where thou hast crept.  
O fate of fools ! Officious in contriving ;  
In executing, puzzled, lame, and lost !

CONGREVE.

LORD CHICHESTER was a young man as highly endowed by nature and fortune as can well be imagined ; handsome, clever, accomplished, rich, noble ;—and, above all, blest with those excellent dispositions to live and let live, which arise from the union of good principles with good health and good spirits.

He was, in truth, a very happy fellow—had never lost a friend, or made a foe. Even Augustus Langley, who could not quite forgive him his monopoly of good gifts, loved almost as much as he envied him ; and though the prosperities of life had probably some share in gathering together the troops of friends, whose hands were spontaneously extended when Chichester made his appearance either in the House, the Park, Almacks, or any other place of public amusement, yet it was admitted on all sides, that he was fairly entitled to his honours of popularity.

It is not surprising that a man thus circumstanced, should be easy in mind and temper. Lord Chichester's career of life lay before him, smooth as a railroad. Nothing but the dispensations of Providence, or the inadvertence of the engineer, could produce mischance ; and the consciousness of this impunity added elasticity to his step, and sprightliness to his words. He felt himself—

if not humbly, gratefully—to be a favourite of fortune. With the exception of occasional repinings that his home was not better adapted to call forth the instincts of his affectionate nature, he had not a wish ungratified.

Though his opinions and inclinations seldom coincided with those of his father, he admitted that the Earl had been a liberal and indulgent father to him—the Countess an adoring mother—Lady Charlotte an obliging sister. They did nothing to annoy him, with the exception of not choosing to consider persons and things in the same light that he considered them himself; and though these differences of opinion were likely now to take an important turn, by opposing his long cherished attachment for Cecilia Langley, even *this* apprehension did not drive the young man to despair. There was nothing blamable in his choice;—nothing that the world would not regard in the most favouring light; and as the Chichester portion of his father's estates was strictly entailed, he

knew that he incurred no danger of future ruin. The worst result of his presuming to prefer a wife of his own selection to an heiress of his father's, would be the devisal of the Scottish property to his sister;—an alternative with which he was well content to compromise, for the enjoyment of his independence.

Even though aware, therefore, that Lord Delmaine would refuse to sanction his marriage with his cousin, Lord Chichester continued to exhibit the best health and spirits. He had constant opportunities of enjoying the society of Cecilia; and she was so young and her home so happy, that there was nothing very overwhelming in the sentence which threatened to defer their union for a year or two.

Under the care of the wisest and tenderest of mothers, the virtues of his future wife were ripening into all that the heart of man could desire, in the way of womanly excellence. He entertained little doubt that Cecilia liked

him. Her happy face, when he arrived at Langley Park, and her scarcely suppressed tears when he quitted it, inspired him with the hopes indispensable to feed the wavering torch of Cupid. From the first, he determined to hazard no avowal of his attachment, till he came furnished with his father's sanction to claim her hand ;—knowing Cecilia well enough to be certain she would instantly declare all to her mother ;—Lady Mary well enough to be certain she would as quickly confide it to her husband ;—and Morison Langley well enough to feel that he would never receive under his roof, as the avowed suitor of his daughter, a man whose pretensions were not sanctioned, to the fullest extent, by his family.

Prudence, therefore, required him to forbear ; a virtue the more easy, since Cecilia's laughing eyes, sparkling with happiness, attested that she experienced no anxiety for the future ; and since his intimacy with the family had enabled him to witness her rejection of two

of the first matches in the kingdom, in deference, he had little doubt, to predilections in his favour. With such demonstrations, how could he be otherwise than content? How otherwise than cheerful, happy, courteous, amiable? all, in short, that he was admitted to be by the reluctant soul of John Evelyn, Esquire, of the Willows?

And yet, by some strange contrariety of fate, this identical handsome, agreeable, amiable, accomplished only son of a wealthy Earl, was at that moment an object of terror and abhorrence to no fewer than three loving fathers of Great Britain. Lord Grandison had scarcely taken his eyes off Chichester and Lady Alicia at the Gransdens' dinner party, so anxious was he to ascertain the fallacy of Johnny Chichester's notion concerning his daughter's attachment for any other man than the promising son of his friends the Langleys; while from the opposite side of the table, poor Mr. Oakham darted upon the unoffending guest of his son-in-law, such searching and indignant

glances, that it was amazing how Lord Chichester could keep up, with Lady Alicia, such a flow of lively conversation. But when they sat down, the young lady had appeared disappointed and out of spirits; and Chichester was too good-natured not to exert himself for the enlivenment of a handsome girl suffering under a fit of the gloomies—more especially of one who happened to be an intimate friend of his sweet Cecilia!

And now, in addition to the animosities of the Earl and Mr. Oakham, he was beginning to labour under the disapprobation of his revered friend, the member for ——shire!—It was really hard for a person so much in charity with all the world, and so guiltless of offence, to be thus gratuitously hated!—Luckily, however, he was unconscious of the unkind feelings of which he was the object.

He slept the next night well—was free—was happy—

drank his claret unpoisoned by the glances of Oakham and Evelyn ; and before coffee was over, had engaged the hand of Lady Alicia for the second quadrille the following night, at Lady Dulwich's ball, it being his practise to keep the first free, in the hope of gaining a partner in Miss Langley.

Soon after coffee, Lord Grandison's carriage took away Lady Alicia to dress for an evening party, to which she was engaged ; and Lord Chichester having hurried off to the House, Mr. Oakham ventured a remark or two upon both.

“ A fine young man, that ! ” said he, as the young Lord's cabriolet drove from the door. “ But on tolerable terms with himself, I should imagine.”

“ Oh ! don't say a word against Lord Chichester ! ”—cried his daughter warmly. “ Chichester is Gransden's bosom friend. That fine old place to which we drove one morning, the last time you were at Gransden, belongs

to his father Lord Delmaine. They are almost our nearest neighbours."

"It would be an agreeable thing for you, I should think, my dear," observed her father, fixing his eyes inquiringly upon her face, "were this old school fellow of Lord Gransden's to make up a match with your beautiful young friend Lady Alicia?"

"Oh! dear no!—It is a match that would suit none of the parties," cried Lady Gransden, to whom her husband had confided the matrimonial projects of his friend.

"It would be suitable, at least, as regards rank, fortune and age?"—persisted Mr. Oakham.

"Perhaps so," replied Laura. "But it is nevertheless out of the question."

"And why, pray?"—inquired Mr. Oakham, drawing nearer to the sofa where she was sitting.

"Lord Chichester is not likely to marry at present," she replied, not choosing to speak

more explicitly before Evelyn. “ There are obstacles which—in short, neither he nor his friends are in any hurry that he should find a wife.”

“ Extraordinary enough, considering that he is an only son, and heir to so fine a property !” resumed the squire.

“ Why not allow the poor man a little time to enjoy himself, and look about him, before he is tied down to the cares of a family man ?” said Lady Gransden.

“ Scarcely the sentiment I should have expected from one who, only a few hours ago, was boasting the happiness of a married life !” observed her father, sternly.

“ Of a married life, endeared by mutual affection—a very different case from that of Lord Chichester !”

“ But why should Lord Chichester alone, of all the world, be debarred the possibility of finding a wife to his taste ?”

“ Because he has an attachment,” said Laura, lowering her voice, evidently with the view of not being overheard by her husband and Evelyn, who were discussing patent axles at the further end of the room.

“ An attachment incompatible with the happiness of a married life ?” demanded Mr. Oakham, in a husky voice.

“ An attachment which, for years to come, at least, will probably keep him single. But no more on the subject just now, dear papa ! I want to know what you think of Lord Grandison ?”

“ An agreeable, well-bred man. *He*, at least, does not seem to share your predilection for this young coxcomb. I noticed particularly how he took up, at dinner, almost every remark uttered by Lord Chichester !”

“ Lord Grandison is not fond of the Delmaines. Their estates join—a circumstance which, where it does not make people close friends, is sure to make them enemies. Mr.

Evelyn!" said she, raising her voice, "pray how did you like Lord Grandison?—He must be a sort of neighbour, I should think, in Cheshire?"

"So he was obliging enough to remind me! I like him extremely; and both Lizzy and I shall probably profit by the acquaintance."

"That will be delightful for Alicia!" cried Lady Gransden. "Hitherto, poor girl, she has been sadly shut up in the school-room. But Lord Grandison talks of keeping open house this autumn at the Hall. We, among others, have promised to spend a fortnight with him in the shooting season; and it will be charming, indeed, if you and Lizzy contrive to meet us there."

The kindness of this observation was lost to John Evelyn, in the mortifying reflection that Lord and Lady Gransden could find the journey easy to Grandison House, though they had always raised an objection to visit the Willows. It was a comfort to his ill-humour

that Mr. Oakham, at that moment, pleaded fatigue, and proposed retiring.

The following morning, to Oakham's great annoyance, he found Lord Chichester installed at the breakfast table; and discovered, in the course of conversation, that it was by no means an uncommon occurrence. Lord Chichester occupied a small house in Green Street, from which he was often glad to escape to the cheerful domestic society of his friend; more particularly as Gransden and he had constantly some mutual engagement afterwards;—to try a horse, or visit some artist's atelier; or if nothing else was to be done, saunter together to the club.

On the present occasion, his Lordship's object was civility to Lady Gransden's father and brother-in-law. At the party to which, after the division, he had repaired the preceding night, he had taken occasion to mention to Lady Dulwich (who was a distant connexion of the Chichester family, and, having several

unmarried daughters for whom to provide partners and husbands, took care to keep up the courtesies of relationship with the young Lord), that his friend, Lady Gransden, had two gentlemen staying in her house, and would, probably, absent herself, unless her Ladyship could kindly extend her invitation to the whole party. Lord Chichester came, therefore, to bring two cards of invitation to Oakham and Evelyn, for which Lady Dulwich had entitled him to send at an early hour to her house.

“How very kind and thoughtful of you!” cried Lady Gransden. “I wished so much for papa to accompany me to one of our London *fêtes*, and did not feel sufficiently acquainted with your cousin, Lady Dulwich, to make the request. I did not wish one of the Tory set to be able to vent her spleen against me by refusing.”

Oakham was on the point of making an imperious excuse for himself. But a moment's reflection suggested, that a ball-room was no

bad place for pursuing his observations upon the conduct of his daughter ; and, while John Evelyn observed in a surly tone, that *he* had no intention of wasting his evenings at parties during his stay in town when all the theatres were open, Oakham felt it right to repair his son-in-law's incivility, by a courteous acceptance.

That day, at Mr. Oakham's express desire, the Gransdens dined alone ; and, as his occupations and engagements of the morning had tended somewhat to obliterate his impressions on the Chichester chapter, he came home, prepared to believe in the reality of all the happiness seemingly enjoyed by the Viscount and Viscountess. Lord Grandison had left cards for him and Evelyn, with invitations to dinner for the whole party on the Sunday. Oakham had met tribes of friends and acquaintance, by whom he was overwhelmed with invitations ; and, better still, John Evelyn was gone to dine with a country neighbour at the Piazza, to be

in time for Macready's delineation of Bulwer's Richelieu.

The little party at home, meanwhile, was fully prepared to enjoy itself. Lady Gransden had promised to retire early from Lady Dulwich's ball, that she might not be too much fatigued for the drawing-room; and, once more, the happy father's heart bounded with triumph as he looked upon the lovely face of his dear Laura, and listened to the affectionate terms in which she was addressed by her husband. It had been hinted to him, that their mutual happiness would be completed in the course of the winter by the birth of a grandchild, whom he felt likely to be a sad rival to little Laura Evelyn and her brother, in his grand-paternal affections.

The usual expansion of feeling, consequent upon good eating and drinking, brought them all three, by the time dessert was on the table, into the happiest humour. Little dreaming that the Dowager opposite had that very morn-

ing visited Berge's shop, for the purchase of a more powerful glass, in order to make sure of a full and perfect view of the events passing at number four; Mr. Oakham, in drinking his daughter's health after dinner when the servants had quitted the room, stretched out his hand affectionately towards her, and, pressing hers with fervent tenderness, suited the action to the word, as he bad "God bless her!" and all belonging to her.

"And so, this hussy fancies herself the fashion?"—said the fond father, still retaining the hand and looking in the face of the blushing Laura, though addressing her husband. "I remember the time when I used to fancy, like a country clod-pole as I was, that there must be something wondrously hard to acquire in the part of a topping fine lady. One heard such a cry about the elegance of the Duchess of This, and the fascinations of my Lady the Other, that one ended with believing these charming creatures were made of

different clay from other people. It was thought a wonderful thing, you know, when even some popular actress, such as Mrs. Abingdon, or Miss Farren, was able to assume the character for an hour or two !

“ Ay, true—Miss Farren,” observed Lord Gransden, not exactly seeing the drift of his father-in-law’s oration ; “ I have heard people swear that the part of Lady Teazle died with her.”

“ But, now,” resumed Mr. Oakham, in whose discourse, at least, Miss Farren had been only intended to perform a subsidiary part, “ I find that there is much less difficulty in the business than I had been taught to believe ; since a poor country squire’s daughter can, in the course of a year or two, pass muster among the finest ladies in the land !”

“ *Pass muster ?*” cried Lord Gransden, beginning now to understand him. “ If I were Laura, I would not put up with the expression ! I would have you to know, Sir, that Lady

Gransden has been warmly solicited to become a patroness of Almacks. I would have you to know, Sir, that when her portrait was lying the other day at Chalon's, she was tormented to death by the Editors of all the Annuals going, for permission to engrave it ; nay, between ourselves, I would have you to know, Sir, that she has only to say the word, to become a Lady of the Bedchamber at the very first vacancy ! This country gentlewoman, whom you are pleased to disparage, never passes the threshold of a ball-room, without having all those who are brave enough to avow themselves unacquainted with the fashionable Lady Gransden, pressing forward with solicitations for an introduction !”

“Come, come, you are practising, I see, on the poor squire's credulity !” said Oakham, pressing Laura's hand to his lips ere he relinquished it. “You want me to write all these fine things to her mother ; that Mrs. Oakham may go prating about among our country neighbours, as we are accused of having done

before. However, to-night I shall see and judge for myself. I'm sorry John Evelyn could not be persuaded to meet us at Lady Dulwich's after the play; for I should like him to have been able to describe to poor Lizzy, on his return to Cheshire, the figure cut by her sister in London. However, Mrs. Evelyn must content herself with such an account as can be given by her stupid old father."

It was in compliance with the fond expectations thus avowed, that Lady Gransden was careful to array herself in her richest attire, to do honour to Lady Dulwich's ball. Contrary to her custom, she put on all her diamonds; and, in a double dress of the lightest white tulle looped up with bouquets of scarlet honeysuckle, looked so nymph-like, yet so distinguished, that Oakham, with tears in his eyes, seemed to wonder so lovely a creature was not born to be a queen. Lady Gransden found it impossible not to sympathize in his honest pride, or to forbear a throb of womanly exul-

tation, that, for once, her triumphs in society would be witnessed by one who took unmingled pleasure in her prosperity.

“I have been waiting for you,” said Lord Chichester, who stood at the door of Lady Dulwich’s splendid ball-room, in expectation of the arrival of the party. “You have already presented Mr. Oakham to my trusty and well-beloved cousin?—Good!—and now, let us introduce him into the motley throng.”

Having taken Lady Gransden from her husband’s arm, as coolly as he would have taken his own hat from a peg, leaving Lord Gransden to bring up the rear with his father-in-law, Chichester proceeded to pilot through the crowd the lovely creature who was so much in the habit of presenting herself to the admiration of society under his protection. It had been his intention to direct her steps towards the spot where sat Lady Mary Langley and her daughter, in conversation with one of the foreign ambassadresses; but, on reaching it, he found

the two places on which he had fixed his eye, already occupied; and there was no alternative but to push onward towards the head of the room, where, close to a sofa of honour containing the Duchess of Woolwich, her daughters the Ladies Ridley, and the Marchioness of Gateshead, stood a single vacant chair.

Determined not to lose sight of his daughter, though Lord Gransden chose to remain wedged in the doorway of entrance, Mr. Oakham followed close upon their steps; and, being an utter stranger in the gay scene, people were not at the pains to lower their voices, in commenting upon either the beauty or the conduct of Lady Gransden. Rumour, with her thousand tongues, had been busy all the morning, circulating, in every direction, the scandals originated by the Dowager; and all the world was, accordingly, on the *qui vive* for a scene, on the announcement of Lord and Lady Gransden!

Horror-struck by the first coarse allusion that met his ear, yet resolved to contain himself—resolved to hear every syllable that could be uttered upon the subject—Oakham bit his lip till the blood started, as he followed in the wake of the radiant being of whom, only a few minutes before, he had felt so proud; lending an attentive ear, while the groups through which Lord Chichester and Laura struggled on before him, gave utterance to such comments as the following :—

“ So !—they seem to have patched up a reconciliation ! They arrived together you see ; but he has not courage to advance with her into the room. He dares not expose himself so audaciously to the contempt of society ! See, he is standing in the doorway.”

“ And which of the heroes has the honour of being on guard to-night ? ” demanded another scandal-monger, who had not yet caught sight of Lady Gransden. “ Oh ! Chichester, I see ! *On revient toujours à ses premières amours*, and

no such bad taste neither ! A gentlemanly pleasant fellow like Chichester is worth half a hundred rascally foreigners ! Does any one know where she picked up this Spaniard, whom they talk of ?”

“ Not I, at all events !—Well ! you find, that after all, the unloving couple are upon velvet ; which being the case, nobody has a right to say a word. I always persisted there would be no divorce ! Lady Sophia swore that the fair lady would herself forward it, in the hope of at least becoming Countess of Delmaine, as a saving grace among the stiff-necked. But Gransden’s a deuced good fellow, and she’s quite right to stay with him, if she can.”

“ He must be a good fellow, indeed !” replied the other, with a sneering laugh. “ However, to do the Viscountess justice, she’s a deuced fine woman ; and never in her life, by the way, looked better than to-night.”

Every particle of colour forsook the cheeks and lips of poor Oakham, as he tottered for-

ward in pursuit of the delinquents. He arrived just in time to see the Duchess of Woolwich gather up her skirts, and gather together her daughters, and with a withering look at Lady Gransden, sail away from contagion; and while Lord Chichester profited by the movement to pounce upon the place left unoccupied beside the Viscountess by Lady Juliana Ridley, a significant smile passed round the circle; following the example of her Grace, the Marchioness of Gateshead, who was seated to the right of the unlucky pair, began to fan herself with stately dignity, rose, spread her sails, and glided majestically in another direction. Two more couples of less illustrious note, followed; till at length the Viscountess, smiling and chatting, blooming and glittering, and in her innocence wholly unconscious that any thing unusual was going on, remained a solitary mark for the derision of the crowd!

At that moment, she caught sight of her

father, pale and breathless, as she conceived from the heat of the ball, and fancying from the sudden movement around her that the chaperons were hurrying into the refreshment room, beckoned smilingly to Mr. Oakham, intending to inquire whether he would like to go in with her to take an ice, or profit by the number of seats left vacant in her neighbourhood.

But terror in an instant overpowered her faculties; for, from the look and gesture directed towards her by her father, she felt convinced that he was attacked either by fatal illness or sudden insanity. His features appeared convulsed, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets. All self-possession had forsaken him!

“ My father is ill! For heaven’s sake get us out of the room and call the carriage,” she exclaimed to Lord Chichester, starting from her seat, and hastening to Mr. Oakham’s side. “ Dearest—dearest papa! what is the matter? You are faint! the heat of the room is too

much for you ! Lean upon me ! We shall find Gransden in the other room."

And as she spoke, she clung to poor Mr. Oakham ; who writhed and shuddered as he recoiled from contact with the offender. Perceiving that many eyes were fixed upon them, Laura exercised her self-control sufficiently to make her way out of the room, the agitated man following ; while on every side murmurs reached her ear of " What the devil's the matter ? " " Has anything happened ? " " Oh, no, only a scene of some kind, got up by Lady Gransden." But like the Princess Parizade, she turned a deaf ear to these terrible voices, and went on.

On reaching the spot where she had left, and expected to find her husband, no Lord Gransden was to be seen ! She concluded him to be in the refreshment room, the doors of which were too much thronged to admit of seeing or hearing what was passing, but just as poor Laura found herself ready to sink with terror

and distress, distress not a little increased by glimpses of sneering faces and friends standing aloof, a familiar voice addressed her by name ; and Augustus Langley, who was just making his appearance in the ball room, pressed forward to receive her upon his arm, nay, almost in his arms.

“ I am not very well, pray help me to get away. Lord Chichester is gone for the carriage,” was all she found strength to articulate ; and when Mr. Oakham, revolted by her familiarity with this new coxcomb, pushed forward to snatch her from his protection, Augustus, who did not know the father of Lady Gransden by sight, and attributed to some insult inflicted by this rough intruder the state of agitation in which he found her, addressed a few hasty words to the squire, of a nature to call for future explanations.

Lady Gransden was almost insensible by the time she reached the carriage. But her father saw nothing of her distress. The moment

he contrived to extricate himself from the crowd, he pressed forward into the street, scarcely knowing where he was, or whither he was going. It was lucky perhaps that he was unaware, just then, of the proximity between Dulwich House in Privy Gardens, and the river Thames. But as it was, the cool night breezes of that humid quarter of the town, served only to refresh his fevered frame. He could not trust himself to enter a carriage with his daughter; having seen Lady Gransden with her foot on the step, and consequently safe, he determined to walk back to Grosvenor Street. He wanted air to breathe, and space to move in. He wanted freedom of thought and action, freedom for his muttered curses, for his scarcely repressed gestures of menace and despair.

There was not a soul in Lady Dulwich's gorgeous rooms to whom the face of Oakham of Hanbury Park was familiar. There was no Sheerwell of Sheerwell, no Furrowbottom, no

any one who could explain to the wondering assembly that the strange gentleman seized with indisposition, simultaneously with Lady Gransden, was no other than her father ! But even had the gay world been duly apprized of the fact, and aware that the emotion of the poor man proceeded from the agonized feelings of a parent on recognizing the guilt of his child, they would merely have decided that his conduct was “ far from rational, any thing but that of a sensible man ; such exposures being the result of country squirishness, and the tone of a man *qui ne savait pas vivre !*”

END OF VOL. II.

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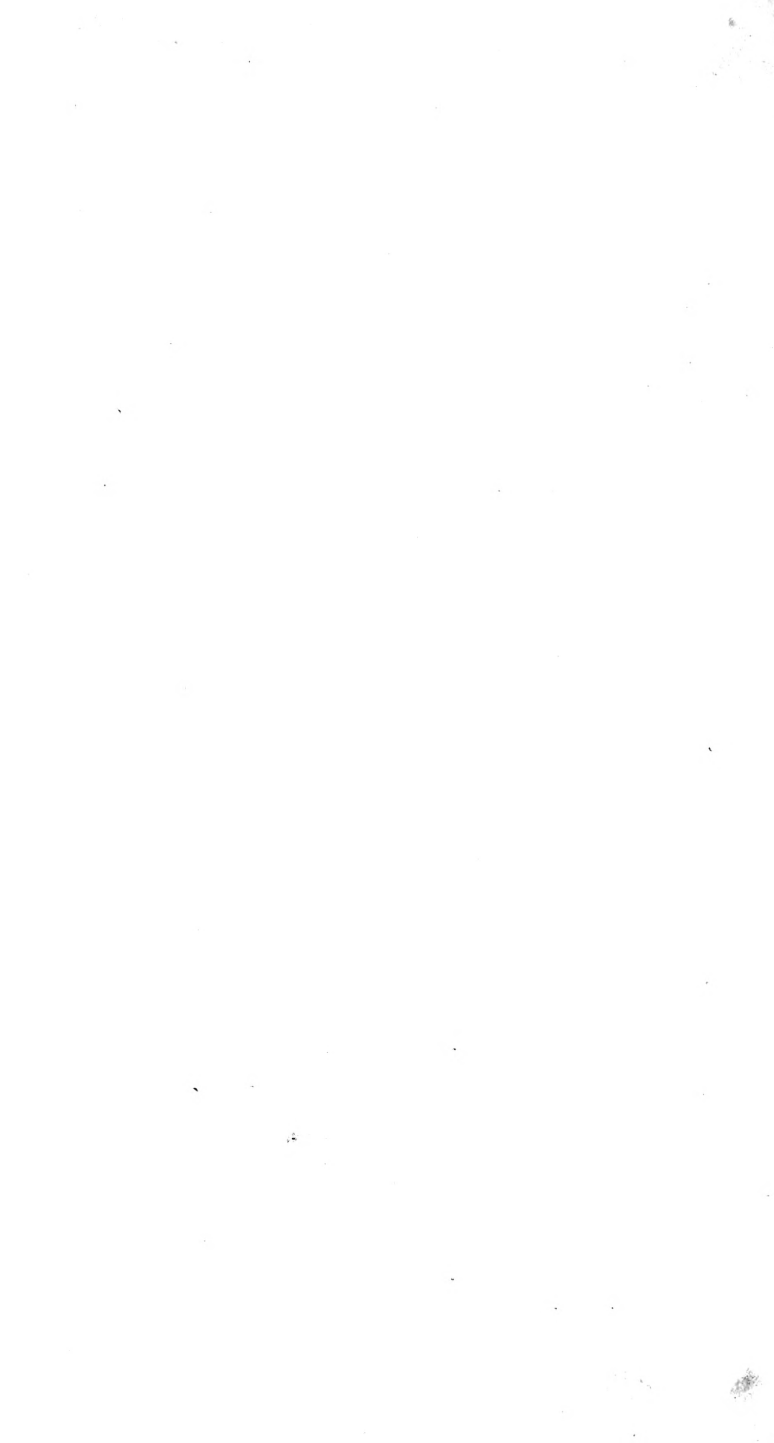
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